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*Philosophical Life in
Cicero's Letters*

SEAN McCONNELL

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PHILOSOPHICAL LIFE IN CICERO'S LETTERS

Cicero's letters are saturated with learned philosophical allusions and arguments. This innovative study shows just how fundamental these are for understanding Cicero's philosophical activities and for explaining the enduring interest of his ethical and political thought. Dr McConnell draws particular attention to Cicero's treatment of Plato's Seventh Letter and his views on the relationship between philosophy and politics. He also illustrates the various ways in which Cicero finds philosophy an appealing and effective mode of self-presentation, and a congenial, pointed medium for talking to his peers about ethical and political concerns. The book offers a range of fresh insights into the impressive scope and sophistication of Cicero's epistolary and philosophical practice, and the vibrancy of the philosophical environment of the first century BC. A new picture emerges of Cicero the philosopher and philosophy's place in Roman political culture.

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The roots of this book lie in my undergraduate days at the University of Otago, where I first came into contact with Cicero's philosophical writings under the guidance of Jon Hall. I have to admit that at first I was somewhat underwhelmed: against the likes of Plato, Aristotle, Kant, as a philosopher Cicero was struggling to rate. What was new? What was good? Was Cicero worth taking seriously as a first-rate philosophical thinker? With no real answers to these worries, my philosophical interests veered elsewhere, and I came to the University of Cambridge driven by a desire to study Lucretius. Soon my interests had shifted to the interaction between philosophy and politics at Rome in the first century BC, and after some years I came once more to read Cicero's correspondence. I was immediately struck by the philosophical elements permeating the letters and began to suspect that Cicero was doing something markedly different from what one sees in his assorted dialogues and treatises. After an encouraging conversation with David Sedley, for my doctoral thesis I decided to focus on philosophy in Cicero's correspondence. As well as a surprisingly agreeable companion, I now consider Cicero to be an engaging, insightful, and indeed innovative philosophical thinker, deserving of a wider and more appreciative audience. It is hoped that this book conveys something of Cicero's intellectual depth and subtlety, and indeed something of his personality.

The majority of the research for this book was undertaken at the Faculty of Classics at the University of Cambridge. It is an incredibly invigorating place to work, and I would like to thank all those involved in the B Caucus, from whom I have learnt a great deal. I also owe thanks to my college, Clare Hall, which provided a supportive and friendly environment for a number of years, as well as the School of Philosophy at the University of East Anglia.

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INTRODUCTION

In a letter to the emperor Antoninus Pius, Marcus Cornelius Fronto wrote:

memini me excerpisse de Ciceronis epistulis ea dumtaxat, quibus inesset aliqua de eloquentia vel philosophia vel de re publica disputatio; praeterea, si quid elegantius aut verbo notabili dictum videretur, excerpsi ... epistulis Ciceronis nihil est perfectius. (Fronto, *Epistulae ad Antoninum imperatorem et invicem* 3.8)

I remember that I excerpted from Cicero's letters at least those passages in which there is some argument on eloquence or on philosophy or on political affairs; moreover, if some witticism seemed particularly elegant or of remarkable expression, I excerpted it ... There is nothing more perfect than Cicero's letters.

Evidently, in the second century AD Cicero's letters were considered, among other things, to be of notable philosophical interest. In contrast, since the discovery of Cicero's correspondence by Petrarch in 1345, interest in the philosophical dimensions of the letters has been remarkably limited. The monumental and magisterial commentaries of Shackleton Bailey are indicative of this:¹ they contain rich and detailed discussion of grammatical, literary, biographical, political, and historical matters; but in comparison, aspects of philosophical significance are all too frequently neglected. Indeed, although Cicero's letters have seen a resurgence of scholarly attention in recent years, focus has been on the literary and stylistic dimensions of the correspondence and matters of sociological

¹ Shackleton Bailey (1965–70), (1977–8), (1980). Note that throughout this study, unless otherwise indicated, I use Shackleton Bailey's text of Cicero's letters. His translations have also been constant companions. They capture in attractive and engaging English much of the personality of Cicero that displays itself in the letters. I have opted to provide more literal translations, although my debt to Shackleton Bailey will be apparent throughout.

and political interest.² Notwithstanding Boes' *La philosophie et l'action dans la correspondance de Cicéron*,³ a provocative but unconvincing study that sees in philosophy an ideological or motivational framework for every one of Cicero's political actions in the period 63–43 BC,⁴ and Griffin's seminal paper, 'Philosophical Badinage in Cicero's Letters to his Friends',⁵ which vividly draws attention to the wealth of material, nobody has set out to undertake a systematic philosophical study of Cicero's correspondence. This monograph does just that: it is a detailed examination of Cicero's letters from a philosophical point of view.

To be sure, Cicero's letters as a whole are saturated with learned philosophical allusion, philosophical humour, and facts of philosophical interest.⁶ Valuable scholarly work has been done on certain aspects of this material. In particular, Rawson derives

² For example, Hutchinson (1998), Oppermann (2000), Beard (2002), Biville (2003), Roesch (2004), Leach (2006), Gunderson (2007), Henderson (2007), Hall (2009), and White (2010).

³ Boes (1990).

⁴ I do not engage with Boes directly in this monograph; it suffices to say that his case is problematic for a number of reasons. First, his handling of the ancient evidence is unsatisfactory. Rather than approaching each of the letters on its own merits, he insists on reading all of them firmly in a philosophical framework, in particular in terms of Cicero's desire to further his own *gloria* and to employ it so as to encourage virtuous rule and the good of his fellow citizens (36–54, 81–262). This leads to some particularly tenuous interpretations. For example, in his reading of a letter to Atticus in which Cicero clearly expresses annoyance and reluctance over being saddled with the governorship of Cilicia (5.2.3 = 95 SB), Boes makes the case (181–200) that Cicero actually thought the governorship to be a great opportunity for *gloria* and to put philosophical conviction into practice, and he is forced to say that this letter in fact illustrates that Cicero did not trust Atticus with his true feelings. Furthermore, throughout the book he simply ignores the obvious possibility that Cicero might sometimes be motivated by ordinary social and political concerns (even when making philosophical allusions), which frequently suffice as an explanation for his conduct. He also rests his argument heavily on speculation about what *may* have been in Cicero's lost *De gloria* (36–54), as well as a dubious characterisation of Cicero as a dyed-in-the-wool Platonist, constantly looking to bring about and put into practice Platonic ideals (265–338). In sum, the philosophical elements in the letters do not support Boes' case, and his attempt to use them as an invitation to analyse all Cicero's political actions firmly in terms of philosophical doctrine is untenable. See further the critical comments of Griffin (1995: 327) and Berry (1992). This study is considerably different from that of Boes in its scope, methodology, and claims.

⁵ Griffin (1995).

⁶ This is demonstrated most admirably by Griffin (1995). Boes (1990: 403–11) provides an incomplete catalogue of passages of philosophical interest. Haury (1955) discusses some of the philosophical humour.

from the letters many facts pertinent to contemporary intellectual culture in her *Intellectual Life in the Late Roman Republic*, which sets a daunting standard for any project of such a kind.⁷ Certain letters have received detailed attention, such as those to Atticus that betray Cicero's ongoing anxieties concerning the composition of the *Academica*.⁸ There has been useful discussion of certain themes, for instance Cicero's exploration of the nature of *otium* and the role and place of philosophy in Roman culture.⁹ The letters that contain details of Cicero's working methods, his source materials, his deliberations on how to translate technical Greek philosophical vocabulary – such as ἐποχή and καθήκον (*Att.* 13.21.3 = 351 SB, 16.11.4 = 420 SB, 16.14.3 = 425 SB) – into Latin, and the publication of and response to his philosophical dialogues and treatises, have also been the subject of considerable scrutiny.¹⁰

However, such studies have a number of limitations. Most scholars approach the letters with an eye elsewhere: frequently the primary motivation to read the letters is so that one can mine them for facts, or else in order to read another text more fruitfully.¹¹ Moreover, scholars tend to interpret the philosophical aspects as playful badinage or as ornamental garnish around other more pressing concerns. This implies that, even if they are unquestionably interesting elements of epistolary discourse between erudite Roman luminaries who share 'cultural capital',

⁷ Rawson (1985).

⁸ Cf. *Att.* 13.12.3, 13.13–14.1, 13.14–15.1, 13.16, 13.18, 13.19.3–5, 13.22.1, 13.23.2, 13.24.1, 13.25.3 = 320–3, 325–6, 329, 331–3 SB. For discussion, see especially Griffin (1997a).

⁹ For example, Schmidt (1978–9), Benferhat (2005: 98–172), Fox (2007: 30–3), and Gildenhard (2007: 8–63).

¹⁰ Notable examples are Boyancé (1936) and Griffin (1995, 1997a). Powell (1995b: 292) and Dyck (1996: 484–8) are useful on Cicero's deliberations about translating the Greek in particular. Most commentaries on Cicero's philosophical dialogues and treatises will cite passages of interest in the correspondence.

¹¹ Rawson (1985) is an excellent example of a scholar exploiting the letters for facts and detail. Bringmann (1971) and Wassmann (1996) make liberal use of the letters in order to analyse all the philosophical works of the 40s in the socio-political context in which Cicero composed them. See also Kumaniecki (1957) with respect to Cicero's *Paradoxa Stoicorum*. Bringmann (1971: 270–7) singles out a letter to Matius (*Fam.* 11.28 = 349 SB) for special consideration, on which see also Griffin (1997b). See also Boyancé (1936).

and might very well provide us with valuable evidence for the nature and scope of this ‘cultural capital’, they are not serious pieces of philosophy in themselves.¹²

In this monograph I adopt a different approach to the philosophical elements of Cicero’s correspondence, which, I hope, will raise the estimation of the letters’ philosophical value and encourage scholars of ancient philosophy in particular to approach this unique, yet sorely neglected collection of texts in a much more nuanced, sensitive fashion. I approach the philosophical elements in the letters as serious and important aspects of Cicero’s philosophical practice, worthy of systematic philosophical study in their own right. Moreover, I critically evaluate Cicero’s letters in the context of the ancient tradition of ‘philosophical letters’. By approaching Cicero’s correspondence in this fashion, I establish that some of his letters are pieces of philosophical literature that stand alongside his recognised philosophical works as genuine components of his philosophical legacy and oeuvre. Furthermore, I demonstrate that we can uncover in the letters plenty of technical philosophy – admittedly, frequently allusive, obscure, or bound up with other concerns – which, once analysed carefully, offers a wide range of important and novel insights into Cicero’s epistolography, his own philosophical knowledge, development, and practice, and the wider philosophical environment of the first century BC.

I elaborate on my interpretative method further below. It must be stressed at this point that this study is by no means intended to be a comprehensive or exhaustive investigation into all the philosophy, or letters of philosophical significance, in Cicero’s correspondence. There is simply too much material, of too disparate a nature, to examine effectively in one forum. Instead, I have decided to limit the scope of the study to a consideration of letters

¹² Griffin (1995: 330) comments: ‘the belief that there is little identifiable technical philosophy there, and that the little that is there is too allusive to be useful, doubtless explains the virtual absence of the letters from collections of philosophical fragments’. She notes that von Arnim (1903–5) includes only two passages in *Stoicorum veterum fragmenta* (Fam. 9.4 = 180 SB, 9.22.1 = 189 SB), Usener (1887) two in *Epicurea fragmenta* (Fam. 7.12 = 35 SB, 7.26.1 = 210 SB), and that Bailey (1926), Arrighetti (1973), and Long and Sedley (1987) include none.

from the period after Cicero's consulship in 63 BC until Caesar's dictatorship in 45. This has the virtue of being a relatively well-defined period in Roman political history (the first triumvirate, the civil war between Caesar and the republican forces, and the eventual triumph of Caesar), in which Cicero's philosophical activities first come strongly to the fore.¹³ I have also chosen to focus on Cicero's engagement with issues pertinent to political philosophy and practical ethics.¹⁴ In each of the book's five chapters I focus on a subject of particular interest and undertake a close reading of a select group of letters.

There are a number of reasons behind my decision to limit the scope of the study to this particular subject matter. For a start, there is quite simply an abundance of rich and variegated material suitable for philosophical analysis. But most of all, it transpires that Cicero's philosophical practice in his letters – his engagement with the tradition of philosophical letters, use of technical argument, and so forth – is most widespread and sophisticated with respect to this subject matter. Thus, focusing on ethical and political issues is an especially effective method to showcase the claims I make regarding the correspondence's philosophical value and significance.¹⁵

In the first chapter, 'Exploring the relationship between philosophy and politics', I demonstrate how certain concerns about the place and role of philosophy in Roman political life, which Cicero raises in the autobiographical prefaces to his philosophical dialogues and treatises of the 50s and 40s, are foreshadowed and developed in some detail in letters from the 60s and 50s. I trace a transition in Cicero's attitudes regarding the relationship between philosophy and politics – from a position where philosophy is

¹³ Note that there are some philosophical elements in letters to Atticus from before Cicero's consulship in 63 BC (1.1.5, 1.3.2, 1.4.3, 1.6.2, 1.7, 1.8.2, 1.9.2, 1.10.3–4, 1.11.3 = 2–10 SB), which I touch on in [chapter 1, section 1.2](#) below.

¹⁴ To be sure, concerns with ethical and political matters permeate the correspondence in a non-philosophical sense as well, and we should by no means feel compelled to analyse all such concerns from a philosophical perspective. Boes (1990) is a good example of the problems that arise from such a critical approach.

¹⁵ Therefore, although this study limits itself to these issues, I hope that it will serve as a model for further investigation into other topics of philosophical interest throughout the correspondence.

dissociated sharply from politics proper, which we can detect in letters from before his exile in 58, to a position where philosophy has a role in practical politics, which is evident by the end of 54 – and analyse the shifting ways in which Cicero presents his own philosophical activities, focusing in particular on his use of the Platonic letters¹⁶ in a famous, open, apologetic letter from December 54, *Epistulae ad familiares* 1.9 (= 20 SB).

In the second chapter, ‘Cicero and Plato’s *Seventh Epistle*’, I undertake a detailed investigation into the philosophical significance of Cicero’s letters to Atticus from the civil war between Caesar and Pompey in early 49 BC. There is striking evidence in these letters that the seventh Platonic letter in particular served as a model or inspiration for Cicero’s own epistolary, philosophical, and political activity at this time. By reading Cicero’s letters to Atticus through and against the seventh Platonic letter, I demonstrate how Cicero carefully constructs a sophisticated philosophical narrative surrounding his life, opinions, and actions in the civil war. In particular, I argue that it is a serious and sustained piece of philosophical autobiography: it is an *apologia* on the general model of the seventh Platonic letter.

In the third chapter, ‘Cicero and Dicaearchus’, I examine Cicero’s engagement with the ethical views of Dicaearchus. There is evidence in certain letters to Atticus that Dicaearchus was, in particular, an important figure in Cicero’s deliberations on the question of the best life, the choice between pursuing the contemplative life or that of political activity. However, we do not possess a clear account of Dicaearchus’ arguments for the supremacy of the political life in the surviving evidence from antiquity; nor is it clear how his stance relates to the opposing positions of Theophrastus and Aristotle in the Peripatetic tradition. I reconstruct Dicaearchus’ views and assess how they figure in Cicero’s ethical and political deliberations, focusing in particular

¹⁶ One might prefer to talk of the pseudo-Platonic letters. Note that throughout this study I present these letters as genuine works of Plato. This is not intended to convey my own judgement on the letters’ authenticity, but rather to reflect the fact that Cicero and his contemporaries thought that they were indeed genuine; see further [chapter 1, nn. 14–15](#) below.

on an epistolary exchange with Atticus on the eve of the civil war between Caesar and Pompey in 50 BC.

In the fourth chapter, ‘A Stoic lecture: *Epistulae ad familiares* 9.22’, I analyse perhaps the most detailed and technical philosophical letter in the extant correspondence. The letter is addressed to Lucius Papirius Paetus and takes the form of a formal Stoic *schola* or lecture, on the question whether the wise man will speak frankly and call a spade a spade. The letter, I argue, was written at the same time as the *Paradoxa Stoicorum* (March/April 46 BC) and shares many of their attributes, in particular a critical commentary on Caesar, fresh from his decisive victory over the republican forces in Africa. Building on my detailed analysis of Cicero’s handling of various philosophical issues surrounding personal liberty and free and frank speech in 9.22 (= 189 SB), I then examine and assess the ways in which he employs Stoic and Academic philosophy in a number of letters from 46 and 45 BC as a means to highlight and resolve ethical and political issues that have become problematic under the new regime.

In the fifth chapter, ‘Dealing with Caesar: the συμβουλευτικόν’, I examine Cicero’s attempt to deal directly with Caesar in 45 BC via the medium of the philosophical letter of advice. A vivid series of letters to Atticus details Cicero’s plan and addresses the letter’s content and reception. Philosophical elements abound and, most strikingly, Cicero refers to using Aristotle’s letters to Alexander the Great as a model. Here I explore Cicero’s handling of philosophical themes such as *gloria* and the good king as he seeks to influence and relate to Caesar, now in a position of dictatorial power.

Although these five chapters are presented as discrete ‘case studies’ focusing on a particular topic or aspect of Cicero’s philosophical practice, there are a number of themes that run throughout them all. For instance, in all the chapters we observe Cicero’s ongoing preoccupation with the question of the best life, the question whether the life of *otium* and theoretical reflection is better than that of political activity. Throughout we see Cicero dealing with the question how one should weigh and reconcile the competing claims of the *honestum* (‘the honourable’ or ‘the good’) and the *utile* (‘the expedient’). And in all five chapters

we examine Cicero's exploration of the ways in which philosophy can be pursued and applied effectively or legitimately in Roman political life. The five studies demonstrate how Cicero deals with such ethical and political issues in different ways at various times, drawing where appropriate on a rich background of philosophical sources, approaches, and interests (which we can detect in the letters themselves).

The five chapters are organised in such a way as to complement one another as much as possible.¹⁷ The first two can be considered a pair: both deal primarily with Cicero's engagement with Platonic philosophy, in particular the Platonic letters. They share and offer different perspectives on a number of specific concerns, such as the development of Cicero's philosophical profile, his use of Platonic epistolary models, and his application of Platonic and Academic arguments and models in the realm of Roman politics. The third, fourth, and fifth chapters, in which I consider Cicero's use of Peripatetic and Stoic philosophy,¹⁸ balance and contrast with the first two: they show that Cicero employs a much wider range of philosophical resources and approaches in his letters than those we might associate closely with the Academy.¹⁹ The first

¹⁷ This means that although the letters I consider are drawn from across a long period of time and differing circumstances, the chapters do not follow a chronological order.

¹⁸ Note that although I do not devote a chapter specifically to Cicero's use of Epicurean philosophy, we shall often see him handling various topics associated closely with Epicurean ethical and political thought. Cicero's engagement with Epicureanism in correspondence with proponents such as Gaius Cassius Longinus (*Fam.* 15.16–19 = 213–16 SB), Gaius Trebatius Testa (*Fam.* 7.12 = 35 SB, 7.14 = 38 SB, 7.16 = 32 SB), Atticus (e.g., *Att.* 4.6.1 = 83 SB, 7.2.4 = 125 SB), and Papirius Paetus (*Fam.* 9.25 = 114 SB) has already been well noted and fruitfully analysed in terms of badinage; see especially Griffin (1995: 331–9). For detailed discussion of Cicero's treatment of Epicurean philosophy more generally, see Maso (2008).

¹⁹ I try as much as possible to avoid the question of determining Cicero's philosophical allegiance and whether it changed at various periods. Cicero was clearly well schooled in all the major schools of philosophy: as a young man at Rome he attended the lectures of Philo, head of the sceptical New Academy (*Brut.* 306); between 79 and 77 BC he studied at the Academy in Athens and attended the lectures of Antiochus, head of the Old Academy (*Fin.* 5.1); while at Athens he also attended the lectures of the Epicurean Phaedrus, among others (*Fin.* 1.16); the Stoic philosopher Diodotus, who came to Rome in 88 BC, lived in his house (*Brut.* 309). Cicero himself provides a detailed account of his formative education in *Brutus* 303–22, and Wood (1988: 42–69) provides an accessible summary with further references. It is standardly maintained that Cicero was a consistent adherent of the sceptical New Academy. However, some scholars have questioned this. On this debate, see further the arguments in Glucker (1988), Steinmetz (1989), Lévy (1992), and Görler (1995, 1997). I am content to show how Cicero

chapter also serves a programmatic function: it identifies Cicero's early and often embryonic engagement with themes and subjects that are explored and developed in further detail in the other four chapters, such as Dicaearchus' relevance for the question of the best life and the use of Socrates and Plato as exemplary models. Moreover, the second, fourth, and fifth chapters are closely related: they all focus on Cicero's use of philosophical material that reflects on issues surrounding personal liberty and free and frank speech, as he attempts to navigate the problematic socio-political environment at Rome during the civil war and Caesar's dictatorship.

The five studies are, therefore, intended to have a cumulative persuasive role and to be mutually reinforcing.²⁰ When put together, they produce a detailed picture of the impressive scope, sophistication, and vibrancy of Cicero's epistolary and philosophical practice, offer a range of fresh insights into his philosophical activities, knowledge, and development, and demonstrate the considerable importance that the correspondence has for our understanding of Cicero's philosophical life and legacy.

Clearly this project relies heavily on how we view the nature of the evidence with which we are dealing, and also the soundness and applicability of the philosophical approach that I am proposing. A number of methodological issues need to be addressed before we begin.

The nature of the evidence continues to be a difficult and contentious matter. There are a number of questions surrounding the organisation, editing, and publication of the letters that continue to be debated, but about which we cannot be certain.²¹ Uncertainty about many of these issues does not affect us

employs in his letters a wide range of philosophical resources and approaches, where appropriate as circumstances dictate, and how he engages knowledgeably and comfortably with many philosophical figures, traditions, arguments, and texts. This is a practice we might expect of a learned Academic sceptic, and on the whole the letters perhaps lend most support to this view of Cicero's philosophical allegiance, but I do not wish to focus overly much on this issue.

²⁰ I provide extensive cross-references between chapters in the notes.

²¹ There is good evidence that the letters were published before the end of the first century AD; see especially Setaioli (1976), Beard (2002: 116–19), and White (2010: 31–61). Cornelius Nepos refers to being allowed to read Atticus' personal volumes of Cicero's letters soon after his death (*Att.* 16). There is extensive bibliography in Nicholson (1998)

significantly. For us, the most pressing problem arises from the organisation of the letters into books. Each separate collection of letters has been organised into books by some ancient editor, sometimes around a particular theme, as in *Epistulae ad familiares* 13, comprising solely letters of recommendation, and 14, comprising letters to Cicero's wife Terentia and other household members.²² It would appear that the corpus as a whole has been consciously put together in a particular manner for one reason or another; and this is clearly an important fact we cannot ignore.²³

and White (2010: 175), and the key evidence is presented in Büchner (1939). Cicero himself professes interest in editing and publishing selected correspondence: *meorum epistularum nulla est συναγωγή; sed habet Tiro instar septuaginta, et quidem sunt a te quaedam sumendae. eas ego oportet perspiciam, corrigam; tum denique edentur* (Att. 16.5.5 = 410 SB). In *Fam.* 16.17.1 (= 186 SB) he jokes that Tiro too wants his letters made into volumes (*video quid agas; tuas quoque epistulas vis referri in volumina*), which suggests that letters were being organised into collections in Cicero's own lifetime (cf. Att. 9.10.4 = 177 SB). But clearly Cicero himself did not organise, edit, and publish the entire corpus as we have it. Tiro and Atticus are cited frequently as the obvious culprits; see further McDermott (1972) and Zetzel (1973). The corpus itself is gargantuan: we have 931 extant letters, organised in separate collections *ad familiares*, *ad Atticum*, *ad Quintum fratrem*, and *ad Brutum*, beginning in 68 BC and continuing until just before Cicero's death on 7 December 43. In addition, we know that many more letters once existed in other collections in antiquity but are now lost; and we know that many letters simply never made it into a collection – see further Nicholson (1998: 76–87) and White (2010: 31–61, 171–5); also Shackleton Bailey (1965–70: 1.60, 1.68–9).

²² Note that certain books form larger units within the collection as a whole. For instance, books 7–10 of the *Epistulae ad Atticum* all concern the episode 'Cicero in the civil war' and are demarcated clearly from books 6 and 11.

²³ We have received the correspondence organised into books in the manuscripts, and there is no reason to doubt that this is how the letters were presented in antiquity. Beard (2002: 117) notes that 'in antiquity the books were apparently not known by numbers, but by the name of their first addressee' (she cites Aulus Gellius *NA* 1.22.19, 12.131.21). The manuscripts by all accounts appeared something of a mess to the scholars who first looked at them critically: as well as the problems with the Latin, they found it difficult to discern any order in the sequence received from antiquity; see Shackleton Bailey (1965–70: 1.77–101, 1977–8: 1.3–26), Ramage (1967: 318), and Beard (2002: 107–16), for the history of this critical reception. Beard (2002) stresses the importance of the original presentation of the letters in the face of modern attempts to reorganise them into chronological order, most famously by Tyrrell and Purser (1879–1933), whose practice has been followed in part by the current authority, Shackleton Bailey (1965–70, 1977–8, 1980). I am inclined to agree with Beard that repackaging the letters in this manner loses an important aspect of the corpus, namely that the letters were intended to be read in books for specific reasons, and (the desired) effects rely on each letter's place in relation to the others. However, neither the modern nor the ancient order would necessarily be Cicero's – chronological sequence does not salvage Cicero's organisation of the collection – and, as I make clear in the next paragraph, it is vital when we interpret the letters that we distinguish between what is editorial and what is authorial.

Since the letters were organised into books by an editor, we have two different texts: on the one hand, each of Cicero's letters is a discrete unit, a distinct text constructed by Cicero; on the other hand, each book is also a discrete unit, a distinct text constructed from Cicero's units by an editor. Moreover, each of Cicero's distinct letters (as we have them) is embedded in the context of the editor's books and derives meaning from its relationships with the other letters in the collection.²⁴ This is important: we need to be careful when we approach the letters to distinguish between the editor and Cicero. Indeed, as soon as we read the letters in the book format, that is, as a narrative or sequence, we are making judgements on the editor's presentation of things rather than on Cicero's. This presents a serious hermeneutical problem: how can we read the letters as a narrative and make reasoned judgements on Cicero's practice? As well as resisting the invitation to read the letters as books, the tactic I have adopted is to search for evidence that Cicero himself has constructed a narrative across a number of letters – all the better if the sequence happens not to coincide with the editor's organisation of the narrative. The most compelling evidence is inter-epistolary allusion and reference: in these cases we are justified in attributing to Cicero himself the effects of reading certain letters in a group or in narrative sequence. This is most pertinent with respect to [chapter 2](#).

To be sure, this philosophical study is not an isolated or reactionary enterprise: it takes place within a well-established critical framework. Scholars now approach Cicero's letters with an acknowledgement that they are sophisticated works of literature,²⁵ problematic documentary sources rather than transparent windows on Cicero and his times.²⁶ The traditional dichotomy between Cicero's 'private' correspondence and his 'public'

²⁴ On 'intratextuality', see further Sharrock (2000).

²⁵ There are 'literary' studies utilising a wide range of theoretical and critical approaches; see for example, Jäger (1986), Hutchinson (1993, 1998), Oppermann (2000), Beard (2002), Gunderson (2007), and Henderson (2007) with extensive further bibliography.

²⁶ For a particularly assertive discussion of the problems inherent in using the letters as historical evidence, see Gunderson (2007); compare Schröder (2004–5) and Lintott (2008: 3–8).

works has been weakened. As our knowledge of Roman literary culture and the mechanics of ‘publication’ increases,²⁷ it is becoming clearer that the letters are a genuine part of Cicero’s literary oeuvre and that in writing letters Cicero was consciously doing something ‘public’.²⁸ Indeed, scholars are highly sensitive to the various roles or functions that the letters played in the contemporary social and political environment.²⁹ In particular, they have shown how the letters serve to construct certain public personae, images, or identities that may or may not be an accurate representation of the historical Cicero (or his actions and opinions), but perform particular social functions, not least the maintenance in public of Cicero’s high social status, his political allegiances, and his good reputation.³⁰ Thus, the letters allow us to

²⁷ Evidence suggests that ‘publication’ at this time involved public recital or the circulation of copies of the text among *amici* (who could of course copy the text and keep disseminating it more widely); see further Sommer (1926), Starr (1987), Murphy (1998), Nicholson (1998: 104), Gurd (2007). We can appreciate that letters and works of literature were disseminated or ‘published’ in the same social networks and via much the same mechanisms; see Steel (2005: 46).

²⁸ Of course, there are subtleties: some letters are clearly open (e.g., *Fam.* 1.9 = 20 SB, 9.8 = 254 SB, 13.1 = 63 SB), some letters are clearly intimate, some are written in coded language (e.g., *Att.* 1.18.8 = 18 SB, 2.20.3–5 = 40 SB), and at times Cicero may have fervently wished the content stay private. It cannot be said that Cicero intended all the letters for ‘publication’ in a strong sense of the word. In any case, we get the impression from Cicero that letters were read by third parties as a matter of course, either by permission or furtively, and he himself often shares others’ letters with a third party (e.g., *Att.* 7.17.2 = 141 SB, 8.9.1–2 = 188 SB, 13.27 = 298 SB). In a speech Cicero complains that one of his letters was read in the lawcourts (*Phil.* 2.7); see Steel (2005: 45–7). It seems to have been accepted that merely by putting pen to paper one was doing something ‘public’; compare Varro’s comment in the *Academica*: ‘*minime vero*’, *inquit ille*, ‘*intemperantis enim arbitror esse scribere quod occultari velit*’ (1.2). Hall (2009: 24–7) discusses the category of the ‘semi-public’ letter, which he argues was written with the knowledge that it might become widely disseminated (cf e.g., *Fam.* 15.21.4 = 207 SB). On issues surrounding the confidentiality of Cicero’s letters, see Nicholson (1994) and White (2010: 11–15, 31–4).

²⁹ See especially the two recent monographs by White (2010) and Hall (2009). In particular, they both make the important point that in late republican Rome the letter was a proxy face-to-face interaction: letters seem to have been exchanged almost exclusively when face-to-face interaction in environments such as the Forum was impossible – White (2010: 18–21) and Hall (2009: 16–18, 21–7). Throughout their monographs White and Hall explore various ways in which Cicero’s letters recreate the same dynamic personal yet public environment, and various functions they might perform within this carefully crafted social space.

³⁰ In addition to White and Hall, whose work is informed largely by sociolinguistics and communication theory, see also Schneider (1998), who uses Cicero’s letters to reconstruct the ‘cultural capital’ shared by Roman aristocrats and the ways in which such knowledge and shared certainties informed political practice and social interactions

track Cicero's management of his public profile, which offers all sorts of insights into the literary and political culture of late republican Rome.

The present study builds on this previous scholarship. In the critical framework established by White, Hall, and Schneider among others, it draws particular attention to the place and function of philosophy in Roman aristocratic discourse of the late republic, and the various ways in which Cicero finds it an appealing and effective mode of self-presentation, and a congenial and pointed medium for talking to his peers about ethical and political concerns.³¹ Moreover, it is premised heavily on exploiting the opportunities presented by the literary art of the letters. Cicero's use of a wide range of literary devices – such as allusion, historical *exempla*, conversational language, humour, code-switching into Greek, and prose rhythm – is already well documented.³² For us, the most important literary device is the allusion or reference to philosophical figures, arguments, and texts.

Such allusions and references can take a number of forms. They can be direct quotations (e.g., *Att.* 9.13.4 = 180 SB, *Fam.* 15.16.1–2 = 215 SB), with or without the source, a speaker or

more generally, including the plausibility and appeal of various modes of self-presentation. A major aim of the present study is to demonstrate the various ways in which Cicero exploited philosophy, which was associated closely with Greek lifestyle and culture, as a plausible and effective mode of self-presentation for a Roman aristocrat. There are further useful discussions in Hariman (1989), Hall (1998a, 1998b, 2005a, 2005b), and Steel (2005: 83–114; her chapter on Ciceronian communities). See also Cotton (1986), Ebbeler (1998), Leach (1999, 2006), Gunderson (2007), and Henderson (2007). Public self-fashioning in the rhetorical works is explored by Dugan (2005). Gildenhard (2011) explores similar concerns in his study of Cicero's speeches, which has much helpful discussion on Cicero's use of philosophical material.

³¹ White (2010: 89–115) focuses on literature in general in this regard, concluding that 'Cicero could exploit literary culture as a kind of code in the letters not only because it was the product of a common schooling, but also because it continued to be regarded in some sense as a form of practical discourse' (115). Similarly, throughout the five case studies we shall explore how and why Cicero exploited philosophy as a specific mode of practical discourse on ethical and political matters.

³² On Cicero's epistolary style in general, see Hutchinson (1998) and Jäger (1986) with extensive further bibliography. On Cicero's use of Greek in particular, see Steele (1900), Rose (1921), Shackleton Bailey (1962, 1963), Baldwin (1992), and Adams (2003: 308–47); also chapter 2, section 2.6.2 below. On historical *exempla*, see Oppermann (2000); on conversational language, see Monsuez (1952, 1953) and Hoffer (2007); on prose rhythm, see Hutchinson (1995) and Berry (1996); on his frequent allusions and references to a wide range of Greek and Latin literature, see White (2010: 89–115, 177–9).

text, attributed; close paraphrase (e.g., *Fam.* 1.9.18 = 20 SB, 7.26.1 = 210 SB, 15.18.1 = 213 SB, *Att.* 4.16.2–3 = 89 SB, 10.8.6 = 199 SB), with or without the source attributed; name-dropping or singular technical terms (frequently in Greek);³³ imagery, comment, or argument, made without any explicit reference to a source, but none the less resonant or evocative of certain philosophical figures, texts, or traditions (e.g., *Att.* 6.9.4 = 123 SB, 9.10.2 = 177 SB, *Fam.* 7.12 = 35 SB). There are numerous possible reasons why Cicero makes such allusions. It is clear, however, that Cicero's stylistic practice routinely presupposes a shared knowledge of such philosophical facts, figures, texts, and arguments on the part of his correspondents.³⁴ There are high expectations of the reader: Cicero tailors his literary art to the

³³ Indeed, the presence of Greek terms is one of the strongest indicators that Cicero is making a philosophical allusion or reference.

³⁴ Griffin (1995: 326–30) notes that philosophical allusions and references are notably less common than other literary devices, and that they are made to a more limited epistolary community. Using the presence of such allusions and references as a criterion, correspondents who could be expected to recognise and understand them are, in no particular order: Atticus, Cicero's brother Quintus, Marcus Junius Brutus, Marcus Porcius Cato (*Fam.* 15.4 = 110 SB), Marcus Terentius Varro (*Fam.* 9.1–8 = 175–81, 254 SB), Gaius Cassius Longinus (*Fam.* 15.16–19 = 213–16 SB), Cicero's wife Terentia (*Fam.* 14.1 = 8 SB), his secretary Tiro (*Fam.* 16.17 = 186 SB), Appius Claudius Pulcher (*Fam.* 3.7, 3.9 = 71–2 SB), Publius Lentulus Spinther (*Fam.* 1.5a = 15 SB, 1.9 = 20 SB), Lucius Luceius (*Fam.* 5.13 = 201 SB), Marcus Fabius Gallus (*Fam.* 7.26 = 210 SB), Nigidius Figulus (*Fam.* 4.13 = 225 SB), Aulus Manlius Torquatus (*Fam.* 6.1–4 = 242–5 SB), Lucius Mescinius Rufus (*Fam.* 5.19 = 152 SB, 5.21 = 182 SB), Servius Sulpicius Rufus (*Fam.* 4.2–4 = 151, 202–3 SB), Volumnius Eutrapelus (*Fam.* 7.33 = 192 SB), Trebianus (*Fam.* 6.10b = 222 SB), Marcus Marius (*Fam.* 7.3 = 183 SB), Matius (*Fam.* 11.27 = 348 SB), Manius Curius (*Fam.* 7.28 = 200 SB), Gnaeus Domitius Ahenobarbus (*Fam.* 6.22 = 221 SB), Publius Cornelius Dolabella (*Fam.* 9.14 = 326 SB), Gaius Memmius (*Fam.* 13.1 = 63 SB), Lucius Papirius Paetus (*Fam.* 9.16–17, 9.20, 9.22, 9.24–6 = 114, 189–90, 193, 195, 197, 362 SB), and Gaius Trebatius Testa (*Fam.* 7.12 = 35 SB, 7.14 = 38 SB, 7.16 = 32 SB, 7.19 = 334 SB). Following Schneider (1998), we can appreciate that philosophical resources were a significant part of shared 'cultural capital' in the late republic, although (on the basis of references and allusions in Cicero's correspondence) the appeal of philosophy as a mode of political and social communication and presentation was in all likelihood limited to a sophisticated aristocratic elite of a certain intellectual persuasion (although compare chapter 1, section 1.1 below). Indeed, in an appendix, White (2010: 177–9) illustrates clearly that references to contemporary non-philosophical literature are far more frequent, and appear in letters to a much wider range of correspondents. See in particular Gildenhard (2011) for detailed analysis of Cicero's use of philosophy in relation to other established modes of political and social discourse in his speeches, which had a more variegated audience; it is, in general, notably less ornate and sophisticated than what we find in the letters.

intellectual level of his correspondents and he frequently requires and expects them to actively unpack or decode the meaning.³⁵

A letter to Marcus Terentius Varro from 46 BC is a particularly good example of the sophistication of Cicero's stylistic practice and the efforts required on the part of the reader:

CICERO VARRONI

Περὶ δυνατῶν με scito κατὰ Διόδωρον κρίνειν. quapropter, si venturus es, scito necesse esse te venire; sin autem non es, τῶν ἀδυνάτων est te venire. nunc vide utra te κρίσις magis delectet, Chrysippi an haec quam noster Diodotus non concoquebat. sed de his etiam rebus, otiosi cum erimus, loquemur. hoc etiam κατὰ Χρύσιππον δυνατὸν est. de ἡχοτιοῖ mihi gratum est; nam id etiam Attico mandaram. tu si minus ad nos, accurremus ad te. si hortum in bibliotheca habes, deerit nihil. (Cicero, *Epistulae ad familiares* 9.4 = 180 SB)

Cicero to Varro

Concerning things possible you may be sure that I agree with the view of Diodorus. And therefore, if you are going to come, you may be sure that it is necessary for you to come, and on the other hand if you are not going to come, you may be sure that it is impossible for you to come. Now see which judgement pleases you more, Chrysippus' or this one, which our friend Diodotus used to find hard to stomach. But we shall also talk of these things, when we are at leisure. This is also possible according to Chrysippus. Thank you about (?);³⁶ for I had also entrusted it to Atticus. If you do not come to me, I shall run over to you. If you have the Garden in your library, there will be nothing lacking!

Cicero expects Varro to recognise the conclusion of Diodorus Cronus' so-called 'Master Argument'. In brief terms, this argument maintains that only what is or will be is possible; hence, if something is possible it is necessary and if something does or

³⁵ In his correspondence Cicero often comments about the tremendous efforts he makes to ensure his letters' appropriate style and format. The most notable example (*Att.* 13.25.3 = 333 SB) concerns his letter to Varro regarding the dedication of the *Academica* (*Fam.* 9.8 = 254 SB) that may have prefaced the treatise itself. Note also *Att.* 5.11 = 104 SB regarding the famous letter to Memmius on behalf of the Epicureans (*Fam.* 13.1 = 63 SB); see also *Fam.* 4.13.1, 4 = 225 SB, 9.21.1 = 188 SB, 15.21.4 = 207 SB, where Cicero mentions stylistic principles for the various genres of letter. Cicero even disowned letters, speeches, and jokes attributed to him because stylistically they were not up to standard (*Att.* 3.12.2 = 57 SB, *Fam.* 3.11.5 = 74 SB, 7.32.2 = 113 SB, 9.16.4 = 190 SB). Compare also [chapter 5, section 5.2](#) below.

³⁶ There is a serious textual problem. Shackleton Bailey (1977–8: 2.316) suggests there is meant to be a name here.

will not happen it is impossible.³⁷ Cicero also expects Varro to know the Stoic Chrysippus' alternative to the Master Argument, which maintains that not everything that is possible is or will be; everything that is possible has the potential to be actualised and will be so long as circumstances do not prevent it, but it is not necessary that what is possible be actualised.³⁸ Without this information, which is not given fully in the text itself, it is very difficult to make any sense of the letter. It is a serious piece of philosophical reasoning, performed in jest, which seeks to force Varro into an untenable position. Cicero says that, according to Diodorus Cronus, Varro will come and stay with him if it is a possibility, and if he does not come then it must mean that it is not a possibility; but, implies Cicero, it is false that he is unable to come as it is clearly a possibility. So, if he does not come, Varro will be forced, like their late Stoic friend Diodotus,³⁹ to agree with Chrysippus against Diodorus Cronus, and plea that circumstances prevented him from coming. It is unclear what effect this is meant to have on Varro's philosophical sensitivities. But, as Cicero says, they could debate such issues when they do meet – which is a certainty since it is possible for Cicero to go to Varro if it really is impossible for Varro to come to Cicero. Moreover, there is another philosophical joke in the second paragraph that relies on Atticus' Epicureanism. Cicero appears to be saying how pleasant it would be to have all three of them present in Varro's library when debating such abstruse issues – a joke that relies on *hortus* referring to the position of Epicurus' Garden on such issues of possibility, actuality, and necessity,⁴⁰ which will be represented

³⁷ The most detailed source for the nature of the Master Argument is Epictetus, *Disc.* 2.19. Cicero himself discusses it in *De fato* (12–17). For detailed critical discussion of the argument, see recently Denyer (2009) with further bibliography.

³⁸ Cicero discusses the views of Chrysippus in *De fato* (7–48, esp. 13); see also Diogenes Laertius 7.75. On Chrysippus' alternative position and its relationship with that of Diodorus, see Bobzien (1993, 2002: 97–143).

³⁹ Diodotus was a Stoic philosopher who lived in Cicero's home and died in 59 (*Att.* 2.20.6 = 40 SB).

⁴⁰ Shackleton Bailey (1977–8: 2.316–17) interprets the joke surrounding *hortus* as meaning 'we shall have food for both mind and body'. Griffin (1995: 341) detects the Epicurean connotation.

by Atticus, while Cicero and Varro take the roles of Diodorus Cronus and Chrysippus.⁴¹

Not everything is so rarefied. Griffin notes that Cicero could expect his wife Terentia to pick up on a straightforward allusion to Epicurean pleasure with respect to Lucius Calpurnius Piso (*Fam.* 14.1.4 = 8 SB), and that he could expect a number of correspondents to be familiar with the fundamental ethical doctrine of the Stoics, Academics, and Epicureans (e.g., *Fam.* 1.5a.4 = 15 SB, 1.9.18 = 20 SB, 3.7.5 = 71 SB, 3.9.2 = 72 SB, 4.2.2 = 151 SB, 5.13.1–2 = 201 SB, 5.19 = 152 SB, 6.1–4 = 242–5 SB).⁴² However, it seems that the more elaborate, technical, clever, or cryptic the material, the more satisfying were the results of this practice for both author and recipient. This is apparent especially in the correspondence with Atticus, in which there is by far the most philosophical and intellectually sophisticated discourse. One particularly good example is a point Atticus made with an enigma about the ‘juice-merchants from Velia’ (7.13.5 = 136 SB). This was apparently so cryptic and made such a subtle point that Cicero did not immediately grasp it: *aenigma succonum ex Velia plane non intellexi; est enim numero Platonis obscurius* (‘I simply do not understand the enigma of the juice-merchants from Velia; it is truly darker than the Platonic number’). Note how Cicero expresses his confusion with a learned allusion of his own. When Cicero did decode the enigma, the meaning of the letter was clear: *iam intellexi tuum aenigma; Oppios enim de Velia succones dices. in eo aestuavi diu. quo aperto reliqua patebant* (‘Now I understand your enigma; for you are talking about the Oppii with “the juice-merchants of Velia”. I exercised my brain on it for a long time. Once that was solved the rest was clear’, 7.13a.1 = 137 SB). Thus, when we detect philosophical allusions and references we should not necessarily expect to discern an obvious meaning in the text itself; we should rather expect to do much of the work, being

⁴¹ Such an image of Atticus, Cicero, and Varro philosophising together is mirrored in the *Academica*.

⁴² Griffin (1995: 328–9).

prepared to use the allusion as a prompt or guide towards other relevant texts and resources.⁴³

Needless to say, when reading the letters we need to be very sensitive to these philosophical allusions and references and their (expected or desired) effects; but it is clearly a pressing question how we should approach them and go about unlocking their meaning. The method I adopt draws on modern theoretical discussion of allusion and intertextuality,⁴⁴ whereby an allusion is ‘a device for the simultaneous activation of two texts’⁴⁵ that is latent in the text but activated only at the moment when a reader identifies it. Once the allusion is identified, the reader is invited to read the entire alluding text against the entire alluded-to text in order to perceive maximal intertextual connections.⁴⁶

This is an approach that gives a considerable degree of freedom and scope to the modern reader, who faces a difficult task guessing the intentions of Cicero and who is not in a position to detect every allusion or intended meaning in the letters (there are doubtless frequent occasions when they are opaque to us); but this is also, broadly speaking, the sort of reading that was expected among Cicero’s own epistolary community. Indeed, it seems that the reader was at some liberty to take things as he saw them and to exercise ingenuity and verve in construing meaning. In [chapter 4](#), for example, we see Cicero pounce on an unintended allusion in Papirius Paetus’ use of the obscene sexual term *mentula* and create an entire philosophical lecture around it, exploiting with great aplomb the philosophical issues and intertextual relationships that

⁴³ At times this requires us to recover or reconstruct lost or obscured aspects of Cicero’s philosophical knowledge and the contemporary intellectual environment, for instance with respect to Dicaearchus’ argument for the supremacy of the active life ([chapter 3](#), [section 3.3](#) below) and Zeno’s semantic theory ([chapter 4](#), [section 4.2](#) below).

⁴⁴ For a stimulating defence of intertextual reading in classical studies, see Fowler (1997).

⁴⁵ Ben-Porat (1976: 107–8); see also Ben-Porat (1979).

⁴⁶ See Ben-Porat (1976: 109–16); also Hebel (1991) and Gale (2000: 5 n. 12). The theory maintains that intertextual connections exist not only between literary texts, but also between texts and historical contexts, and that by tracing and analysing the nature of these connections one can uncover the meaning of the target text. For detailed discussion see, for instance, Still and Worton (1990a), Clayton and Rothstein (1991a), Mai (1991: 33–44), Plett (1991a), and Allen (2000: 14–60). The essays in Plett (1991b) discuss and display many ways of tracing these connections; see also the excellent collection of essays in Clayton and Rothstein (1991b) and Still and Worton (1990b). Extensive bibliography can be found in these works.

Papirius Paetus had evoked unwittingly. Also, in [chapter 3, section 3.5](#) we see Cicero interpret some of Atticus' Greek in a specific philosophical sense so as gently to make fun of him, when perhaps it was not intended by Atticus in a technical philosophical fashion. In any case, throughout the five chapters I have tended towards readings premised on relatively clear allusions and references about which there should not be too much dispute.

At this point, let me draw our attention back to ethical and political matters. To be sure, the letter to Varro that we considered before (9.4 = 180 SB) is a neat example of Cicero's sophisticated literary art and the demands he places on his correspondents. The letter is full of Greek, technical theory, and delivers a respectable philosophical argument in a humorous manner; but the point of the philosophical material and the exchange in this letter might seem somewhat frivolous and leisurely, quite detached from genuine ethical and political concerns. Cicero's use of philosophy in this respect is illustrated particularly well in a detailed epistolary exchange with Gaius Cassius Longinus (*Fam.* 15.16–19 = 213–16 SB). The exchange comprises four letters, three from Cicero to Cassius and one from Cassius somewhat belatedly in reply to all three. The first letter was sent in late December 46 and the last in January 45 BC. The exchange is quite lengthy and the more explicit philosophical allusions in the final three letters have been analysed in detail, most sensitively and incisively by Griffin.⁴⁷ Therefore, I shall focus predominantly on the first letter,

⁴⁷ Griffin (1995: 342–6). It is worth noting that Boes (1990: 60–4) and Dettenhoffer (1990) both detect a very strong political agenda in these letters. Dettenhoffer in particular argues that the philosophical elements are a code for speaking about Cassius' political allegiance. The question 'are you a genuine ally of Caesar or merely pretending to be while you are still in reality a republican sympathiser?' corresponds to 'are you a real Epicurean like you profess to be or are you still really an Academic like me, Cicero?' To be sure, Cicero's probing of the authenticity of Cassius' Epicureanism dominates the exchange (as I illustrate below), but it is less clear how this corresponds to a probing of Cassius' Caesarian sympathies. Dettenhoffer premises her case on the fact that Cicero could not, by his own admission, speak frankly about such sensitive political issues (*Fam.* 15.18.1 = 213 SB, 15.16.3 = 215 SB) and so he was forced to find a suitable mode of indirect speech. In her analysis Griffin (1995: 343) undermines this premiss and casts serious doubt on the cogency of Dettenhoffer's provocative reading of the exchange.

Introduction

which has seen less attention and in which the allusions are more cryptic. The letter is very short and worth presenting in full:

M. CICERO S. D. C. CASSIO

longior epistula fuisset nisi eo ipso tempore petita esset a me cum iam iretur ad te, longior autem si φλύαρον aliquem habuissem; nam σπουδάζειν sine periculo vix possumus. ‘ridere igitur’ inquires ‘possumus?’ non mehercule facillime; verum tamen aliam aberrationem a molestiis nullam habemus. ‘ubi igitur’ inquires ‘philosophia?’ tua quidem in culina, mea molesta est; pudet enim servire. itaque facio me alias res agere ne convicium Platonis audiam.

de Hispania nihil adhuc certi, nihil omnino novi. te abesse mea causa moleste fero, tua gaudeo. sed flagitat tabellarius. valebis igitur meque, ut a puero fecisti, amabis. (Cicero, *Epistulae ad familiares* 15.18.1–2 = 213 SB)

Cicero to Cassius greetings

The letter would have been longer if it had not been sought from me at just the time when your mail was going, longer anyhow if I had some silly tittle-tattle; for we are scarcely able to be serious without danger. ‘Therefore, are we able to laugh?’ you will ask. Not very easily by Hercules; although in truth we have no other diversion from our troubles. ‘Where, therefore, is philosophy?’ you will ask. Yours is in the kitchen, mine is a pain; for I am ashamed to be a slave. And so I pretend to be occupied with other things, lest I hear the reproach of Plato.

About Spain, nothing yet is certain, no news at all. I am sorry for my own sake that you are absent, but I rejoice for yours. But the courier is demanding the letter. Therefore, keep well and fond of me, as you have been from boyhood.

At first glance, the letter might appear to be little more than a piece of opportunism: Cicero received a courier from Cassius, who was at this time staying in Brundisium as he awaited news of the republicans’ last stand in Spain, news which would determine finally the precise contours of the political landscape at Rome. Cassius was in a very awkward position. He had left the republicans after Pompey’s defeat at Pharsalus and headed east. He then sought Caesar’s pardon and switched his allegiance (Cass. Dio 42.13.3–5; Plut. *Brut.* 6.3; Cic. *Fam.* 15.15.3 = 174 SB, *Att.* 11.13.1 = 224 SB, 11.15.2 = 226 SB); at the time of this letter he was in fact Caesar’s legate (Cic. *Fam.* 6.6.10 = 234 SB), which usually would have involved him in military service alongside Caesar in Spain. Defeat for Caesar in Spain would have left Cassius in serious danger from Pompey’s son Gnaeus, who was in command of the republican forces. For Cassius, it was much

safer to be in Brundisium with an easy escape route east if required. In this charged environment Cicero takes the chance to write briefly to Cassius. It seems that, at heart, the letter simply makes clear Cicero's support for Cassius' current course of action and reasserts the importance and intimacy Cicero attaches to their relationship.

It should be obvious that such a reading downplays the first paragraph of the letter, in which there is some serious political commentary interspersed with philosophical allusions. Cicero says straightaway that serious free and frank discussion is if not impossible, at least dangerous; for this reason one is forced to write silly nonsense (φλύαρος) instead. Here Cicero is referring to the pitfalls of expressing his true thoughts about contemporary political matters, while also indicating that he has serious things to say.⁴⁸ He then posits two questions on Cassius' behalf and provides the answers himself. It is not altogether clear how to interpret this part of the letter. Cicero might simply be indulging in some of that silly tittle-tattle he mentioned at the start – some philosophical badinage that is less than serious and not at all on the same level as current events. On the other hand, Cicero might be entertaining alternative pursuits (*aberrationes*) for getting on in these troubled times – either cracking witty jokes, for which Cicero had a great reputation (*Fam.* 9.16.3–4 = 190 SB, 15.21.2–3 = 207 SB), or doing philosophy. Both, he implies, are being done, but they pose their own problems as well: clearly it is very difficult for Cicero and company to laugh when things are so serious (cf *Fam.* 9.7.2 = 178 SB),⁴⁹ but in the case of philosophy things are less obvious.

Cicero states that Cassius' philosophy, Epicureanism, is in the kitchen. This piece of banter, which contains a gastronomic motif that is common in Cicero's pejorative remarks about Epicurus,⁵⁰

⁴⁸ Compare *Fam.* 15.16.3 = 215 SB.

⁴⁹ Here Cicero might also be making a comment about using humour as a mode of frank speech: it is definitely a viable way of speaking seriously about current events, although it is hard to get away with it. In a letter to Papirius Paetus Cicero makes the point that Caesar was at this time receiving reports of what he was saying, his jokes in particular (*Fam.* 9.16.3–4 = 190 SB).

⁵⁰ Compare, for example, *Pis.* 57–62, *Fam.* 7.26.1 = 210 SB, 9.20.1 = 193 SB, 9.25.2 = 114 SB. Also, in other letters from 46 and 45 Cicero was using such gastronomic imagery with respect to certain Caesarians, in order to paint them as rather gluttonous

relies on a very basic knowledge of Epicurean ethics and political thought, and perhaps more precisely familiarity with Epicurus' notorious dictum that 'the beginning and root of all good is the pleasure of the stomach' (409 Usener). The Epicurean focuses on acquiring pleasure (e.g., *Epic. Men.* 129–30) and ordinarily has no care for practical politics (e.g., *SV* 58; 8, 548, 551 Usener). Thus, despite the fraught political situation, the Epicurean opts for the kitchen with all the gastronomic pleasures that brings; he is not worried about the politics so long as he can live pleasurably. Cassius, it is implied, as an Epicurean has no real concerns at present (he is also after all one of Caesar's legates).

In contrast, states Cicero, his philosophy (the mention of Plato suggests it is either Old or New Academic) is annoying or a pain (*molesta*): it offers shame and guilt, and the reason given is being a slave. Why does being a slave cause Cicero shame in the context of his philosophical beliefs? The point relies on a shared knowledge of both Plato's political philosophy and the ethical views of Antiochus of Ascalon, the Old Academic. The Academics (along with the Stoics and Peripatetics) advocate that the good, the *καλόν* or the *honestum*, is to be chosen for its own sake; one should act from and in accordance with what is good or honourable. There are various ways one might do this, but choosing to be a slave to Caesar is clearly not one of them – that is not honourable at all.⁵¹ Indeed, in the third book of Plato's *Republic* it is suggested that free men should fear slavery more than death (386b, 387b), and in the eighth book it is stated that the worst form of slavery is to live under tyranny (564a),⁵² which is declared in Plato's

and depraved individuals (e.g., *Fam.* 7.26.2 = 210 SB, 9.7.1 = 178 SB, 9.15.5 = 196 SB, 9.16.7–9 = 190 SB, 9.19 = 194 SB, 9.20.2 = 193 SB, 9.26.1–3 = 197 SB); see further Leach (1999). It seems that Cicero thought both the Epicureans and certain Caesarians to be decadent and indulgent in much the same way, although the extent to which this implies a general identification of the Epicurean school with the Caesarian political cause is less clear. I explore Cicero's identification of philosophical schools with political causes in [chapter 4](#) below.

⁵¹ To be sure, in the ninth book of Plato's *Republic* it is clear that in the ideal society the lower classes do submit as slaves to the philosophers, the good rulers (590c–d), as is right and proper. Cicero thus suggests that Caesar is not a good ruler, and that he himself is not an inferior, despite his servility.

⁵² Sedley (1997: 49–53) discusses Brutus' use of this Platonic motif with respect to Caesar's rule. Brutus was an adherent of the Antiochean Old Academy.

Statesman to be the worst form of government (302e). And yet Cicero is acquiescent to Caesar, who we can now appreciate is being characterised as a tyrant, when there do not seem to be insurmountable barriers to acting otherwise – he possesses some real degree of personal liberty and so essentially chooses to be a slave. This helps to explain the cryptic comment about the reproach of Plato: Cicero is pretending to be occupied on other pursuits that Antiochus argued could alleviate one's ills in adverse times, namely intellectual activities (Cic. *Fin.* 5.53).⁵³ He does this so that he is not reproached for failing to act in accordance with his professed philosophical beliefs – he pretends he is not interested in politics and has chosen a noble and not a dishonourable path, but his feelings of shame feed the annoying suspicion that he has failed to act properly given the situation.⁵⁴

By teasing out the full implications of the philosophical allusions, the letter (at least in part) now appears to be a brief statement of Cicero's problems in living honourably in the current socio-political climate owing to the limits on freedom and the pressures of his own philosophical convictions. These themes are developed in the following two letters, which contain more explicit and straightforward philosophical allusions.

In his second letter Cicero draws attention to the esteem in which Gaius Vibius Pansa, a senior ally of Caesar⁵⁵ and a

⁵³ Antiochus maintains that virtue is sufficient for one to live *beate* even if external circumstances are bad, but it is not sufficient for one to live *beatissime* (Cic. *Fin.* 5.71, 5.81, *Tusc.* 5.22). On Cicero's intellectual activities at this time, see further [chapter 4, section 4.4](#) below.

⁵⁴ Sedley (1997: 52–3) makes a comment that, I think, captures the nuance in Cicero's thinking: 'Given that suicide is not on the agenda, Antiochean Platonists seems to be left with two choices when confronted with life under a tyranny. To protect their own virtue, they can either withdraw into study, or somehow continue to operate politically. But while their withdrawing into study makes obvious sense in political exile, where the opportunity to improve the happiness of their fellow-citizens is in any case denied them, it is far less obviously satisfactory under a tyranny, where the opportunity may well still exist'.

⁵⁵ Pansa evidently had a colourful political career. He was involved with Caesar's campaign in Gaul (Cic. *Fam.* 7.12 = 35 SB), and he served as tribune of the plebs in 51 BC (*Fam.* 8.8.6–7 = 84 SB) before joining the side of Caesar in the civil war. Caesar nominated him as one of the consuls for 43, and on taking the office after Caesar's death he supported the restoration of the republic (Cic. *Phil.* 5.1, 12–13, 35). On 14 April 43 he took his legions into battle against Mark Antony at Forum Gallorum, where he was mortally wounded (Cic. *Fam.* 10.30 = 378 SB).

professed Epicurean (*Fam.* 7.12 = 35 SB),⁵⁶ is held by the good men (*boni*) because of his honourable humane conduct towards the defeated, which, Cicero claims, demonstrates what Cassius has recently begun to doubt, namely that the good is to be chosen for its own sake:

Pansa noster paludatus a. d. III Kal. Ian. <ita> profectus est ut quivis intellegere posset, id quod tu nuper dubitare coepisti, τὸ καλὸν δι' αὐτὸ αἰρετὸν esse. nam quod multos miseriis levavit et quod se in his malis hominem praebuit, mirabilis eum virorum bonorum benevolentia prosecuta est. (Cicero, *Epistulae ad familiares* 15.17.3 = 214 SB)

Our Pansa left on 30 December dressed in uniform, with the result that anyone could grasp that which you have lately begun to doubt, namely that the good is to be chosen for its own sake. For because he has relieved many people in distress and because he has behaved as a human being in these terrible times, a remarkable goodwill of good men went with him.

As Griffin notes, Cicero is presenting an argument that turns on the philosophical notion of *gloria*: 'it is not Pansa's behaviour that constitutes his proof that τὸ καλὸν is to be chosen for its own sake, but the reaction it inspires in others, the *benevolentia* of men'.⁵⁷ Cicero implies that an Epicurean hedonist cannot explain the reaction to Pansa's actions. In his third letter Cicero then probes the force of Cassius' philosophical convictions further by arguing that the Epicurean account of perception makes no sense (15.16.1–2 = 215 SB). He claims to be testing Cassius' reactions so that he might turn him back from Epicureanism, to which he had converted two or three years earlier (15.16.3).⁵⁸ Thus, Cicero has presented to Cassius two challenges: first, give a coherent defence of the Epicurean theory of perception; and second, deal

⁵⁶ In this letter from 53 BC to Gaius Trebatius Testa, Cicero suggests that Caesar's camp was a hot-bed of Epicureanism: *indicavit mihi Pansa meus Epicureum te esse factum. o castra praeclara!* He also asks whether Trebatius' recent conversion to Epicureanism is just to humour Pansa.

⁵⁷ Griffin (1995: 344). On Cicero's treatment of the philosophical notion of *gloria*, see further chapter 5, section 5.1 below.

⁵⁸ Cassius' original philosophical allegiance is not clear. Shackleton Bailey (1977–8: 2.379) suggests the Old Academy. On Cassius' long engagement with philosophy, see Griffin (1989: 28–32). Sedley (1997: 41) suggests that his conversion to Epicureanism has something to do with the civil war, on the basis of Cicero's comment that he was torn from his previous allegiance 'by force of arms' (*vi hominibus armatis*).

with this claim: if you praise glorious Pansa, as you ought and I am sure you do, then you are not really an Epicurean. So, Cicero presses Cassius, come clean: are you or are you not a genuine Epicurean? Cicero declares two options: either (1) Cassius has no adequate reply to the challenges and his change of philosophical allegiance is merely cosmetic or imposed by circumstances (15.16.3); or (2) Cassius can give an adequate reply and is a genuine Epicurean, in which case Cicero must have underestimated the force of Epicureanism, in particular if it can account for such noble actions: *quamquam quicum loquor? cum uno fortissimo viro, qui, postea quam forum attigisti, nihil fecisti nisi plenissimum amplissimae dignitatis. in ista ipsa ἀρέσει metuo ne plus nervorum sit quam ego putaram si modo eam tu probas* ('But to whom am I talking? To the bravest man of all, who, from the time he entered the Forum, has done nothing unless it is most full of most exalted *dignitas*. I am afraid lest there is more energy in this philosophical school than I thought, if you really do agree with it', 15.16.3). Clearly Cicero is very sceptical about (2) and rather confident about (1).

In his reply Cassius demonstrates skilfully that it is indeed Cicero who has underestimated Epicureanism. After deflecting the criticism about the Epicurean theory of perception (15.19.1 = 216 SB),⁵⁹ he demonstrates that there is no conflict between praise for Pansa's actions and Epicurean ethical theory since, as Epicurus himself stresses, acquiring pleasure requires the very virtues that Pansa exhibits (*ipse enim Epicurus ... dicit* 'οὐκ ἔστιν ἡδέως ἄνευ τοῦ καλῶς καὶ δικαίως ζῆν') – they are the means to the end (15.19.2). It is thus implied that Cicero must agree that the Epicurean is able to act honourably if he accepts that Pansa acted honourably: *itaque et Pansa, qui ἡδονὴν sequitur, virtutem retinet et ii qui a vobis φιλήδονοι vocantur sunt*

⁵⁹ Cassius presents no philosophical argument here. His response depends on brushing aside the authority of the Latin Epicurean prose writer Catus, whose *spectra* (a translation of the Greek εἰδωλα) Cicero had mentioned in his third letter. Indeed, Cassius is dismissive of a surprisingly wide range of Latin philosophical writers in this letter: *rustici Stoici* (15.19.1) and 'all the poor translators of terms' such as Catus and Amafinius and so on (*omnes Catii et Amafinii, mali verborum interpretes*, 15.19.2). For further discussion of these enigmatic figures, see Rawson (1985: 284–5).

φιλόκαλοι *et* φιλοδίκαιοι *omnisque virtutes et colunt et retinent* ('And so it is the case that Pansa, who seeks pleasure, retains virtue and those who are called "lovers of pleasure" by you people are "lovers of the fine" and "lovers of justice" and they practise and retain all the virtues', 15.19.3). Evidently Cicero does accept the fact that Pansa acted honourably, indeed gloriously; and so Cassius turns the tables on Cicero.⁶⁰ Indeed, Cassius stresses that he himself is concerned to act honourably for much the same reasons as Pansa, namely out of a humane concern to avoid wanton bloodshed as a result of the civil war: he suggests that Caesar will offer clemency and pardon as a victor whereas Gnaeus Pompey will offer butchery and vengeance (15.19.4). For this honourable reason, which is also in keeping with his Epicurean beliefs, Cassius supports Caesar and hopes he wins in Spain (15.19.2, 4).

In sum, by using the various allusions in these letters as prompts or guides towards other relevant texts and resources, we are able to see how Cicero uses philosophy as a pointed medium to comment on the limits of freedom of speech and personal liberty under Caesar, to impress on Cassius how one might conduct oneself honourably in the current socio-political climate, and to challenge and probe Cassius' own personal sensitivities about ethics and honourable action. I hope this example provides the sceptical reader with some compelling evidence that an informed and sensitive response to the philosophical allusions highlights aspects of Cicero's ethical and political thinking that would otherwise be less than obvious.

In addition to the core critical framework outlined thus far, some further considerations serve to form a compelling *prima facie* case for reading at least some of Cicero's letters in the ancient tradition of 'philosophical letters', a strategy which in certain instances aids greatly our appreciation of philosophical threads Cicero brings into play and the uses to which he puts them.

First, there is clear evidence that the letter was an established literary vehicle for philosophical works of certain particular kinds

⁶⁰ Griffin (1995: 344–6) provides a lucid and penetrating analysis of this aspect of Cassius' reply.

by the time of the first century BC: for example, *consolatio*, such as that of the Academic Crantor (Cic. *Tusc.* 1.115, 3.12, *Acad.* 2.135; DL 4.27); *apologia*, such as the seventh Platonic letter; the lecture or *schola*, such as Epicurus' letters to Menoeceus, Herodotus, and Pythocles; and the letter of advice or συμβουλευτικόν, such as the eighth Platonic letter and those said to be from Aristotle to Alexander (Cic. *Att.* 12.40.2 = 281 SB).⁶¹ Cicero himself displays familiarity with a wide range of these 'philosophical letters';⁶² and, as I shall highlight throughout the five case studies, there is evidence that some of his own letters are carefully constructed literary works in such recognisable philosophical traditions and formats.⁶³ Hence, we should certainly approach these letters in the same manner we do other letters of this kind, not to mention in the same manner we do Cicero's dialogues

⁶¹ For further discussion of the letter as philosophical vehicle, see Inwood (2007a: 136–46 and 2007b: xiv–xv) with bibliography.

⁶² Cicero displays familiarity with the fifth (*Fam.* 1.9.18 = 20 SB), seventh (*Fam.* 1.9.18 = 20 SB, *Att.* 9.10.2 = 177 SB, 9.13.4 = 180 SB, *Tusc.* 5.100–1, *Fin.* 2.92), and ninth Platonic epistles (*Fin.* 2.45, *Off.* 1.22), with Aristotle's epistles to Alexander (*Att.* 12.40.2 = 281 SB), with Dicaearchus' epistle to Aristoxenus (*Att.* 13.32.2 = 305 SB), with Crantor's consolatory letter (*Tusc.* 1.115, 3.12, *Acad.* 2.135), with Epicurus' epistles (*Fin.* 2.96, 99–100, *Fam.* 7.26.1 = 210 SB), with the Stoic Panaetius' letter to Quintus Tubero *de dolore patiendo* ('on suffering pain') (*Fin.* 4.23), and with the Stoic Posidonius' letter to Publius Rutilius Rufus (which concerned Panaetius' omission of his promised discussion of the conflict between the expedient and the good; *Off.* 3.10); he was almost certainly familiar with many more. Note also that Cicero was familiar with other collections of Greek letters, for instance Demosthenes' letters (*Brut.* 121, *Orat.* 15).

⁶³ On Cicero's use of earlier Greek epistolary models more generally, see Cotton (1984) and Bernard (2006). Note that I do not discuss in depth Cicero's engagement with the genre of *consolatio* (although see chapter 2, section 2.3.1 below). To be sure, there are a number of consolatory letters between Cicero and his correspondents (e.g., *Fam.* 4.5 = 248 SB, 5.14 = 251 SB, 5.16 = 187 SB, 5.18 = 51 SB, *Brut.* 1.9 = 18 SB), and many contain philosophical elements that seem to have been standard features of such letters; see Kassel (1958). These letters of consolation have been ably discussed by, for example, Hutchinson (1998: 49–77) and Wilcox (2005). I also offer no detailed discussion of Cicero's lengthy letter of advice to his brother Quintus (1.1 = 1 SB). Although this letter is a prime example of a philosophical letter, its status as such is widely acknowledged and I feel I have little to add; see further Plezia (1975) and MacKendrick (1989: 2) – also chapter 1, n. 67 below. Note also Gibson and Morrison (2007: 9–13), who argue that the *De officiis*, addressed of course to Cicero's son Marcus, can be classified as a letter in the form of a lengthy *schola* or series of *scholae*. Indeed, some of Cicero's other philosophical works also display signs of epistolarity, for example the *Topica*, which is addressed to Gaius Trebatius Testa. Perhaps our division between Cicero's 'treatises' and his 'letters' is rather too rigid.

and treatises, that is, as sophisticated literary and philosophical texts in their own right.

Now, in order to determine whether Cicero is writing a genuine ‘philosophical letter’, we need some criteria for distinguishing a ‘philosophical’ from a ‘non-philosophical’ letter. There is no way to do full justice to this task without a comprehensive examination of the thousands of letters surviving from antiquity, which is not in the scope of the present study. None the less, we can gather a rather loose set of criteria that will serve as a basic guide. To be sure, the category ‘philosophical letter’ does not appear in the comprehensive catalogue of twenty-one types of letter listed by pseudo-Demetrius in his handbook *Epistolary Types*, which dates from some time between the second century BC and the second century AD.⁶⁴ We can, however, see some of the same types as those listed in the previous paragraph, namely the consoling letter, apologising letter, and advising letter. Interestingly, the lecturing or didactic letter does not appear (although one might imagine a responding or advising letter taking such a form).⁶⁵ Indeed, in *On Style* pseudo-Demetrius warns against writing letters that are really just treatises with a greeting at the beginning and a farewell at the end, citing many of the Platonic letters as examples of this poor practice (228). In any case, it would seem that merely being a consolation or a letter of advice, for example, is not sufficient in itself for a letter to be ‘philosophical’; so what else is needed? In *On Style* pseudo-Demetrius provides some help as he offers stylistic guidelines for discussing philosophical matters in letters: some topics such as logic and physics are not appropriate for letters (230–1); a letter should not be too long or resemble a treatise (228, 234) – rather it should be composed as one side of a conversational dialogue, although the wording should be formal (223–7); a plain and elegant style should be employed (235); a letter should convey the character of the author (227, 231–2;

⁶⁴ Pseudo-Demetrius demarcates the twenty-one types of letter by virtue of their function. For the Greek text and an English translation, see Malherbe (1988: 30–41).

⁶⁵ The didactic letter does appear in the even more comprehensive list of forty-one types of letter provided by pseudo-Libanius in his handbook *Epistolary Styles*, which dates from some time between the fourth and sixth centuries AD. See Malherbe (1988: 67–81) for the Greek text and an English translation.

cf Cic. *Fam.* 16.16.2 = 44 SB); and so on. He uses actual examples to illustrate his points, with the letters of Aristotle acting as the standard of good practice (223, 225, 230, 233–4).⁶⁶ It is clear, however, that if these guidelines were used as strict criteria then certain letters that we would presumably wish to classify as ‘philosophical’ – for example, many of the Platonic letters and Epicurus’ lengthy and technical letters to Pythocles and Herodotus – would have to be omitted, or at least judged as inappropriate or bad examples of philosophical letters.⁶⁷

In practice, it seems that the status or identity of the author and his declared intentions are the most important factors when it comes to categorising letters as pieces of philosophical literature. On the one hand, there is a weak criterion: if a philosopher writes a letter then in so far as he is a philosopher it is tempting to read it with an eye to his philosophical interests, even if they are not explicit in the text. There might be genuine philosophical insights, ideas might find unconscious expression, or his philosophy might inform the text in interesting ways and vice versa. In this sense, all letters by a philosopher are ‘philosophical’. This appears to have been the criterion adopted by ancient commentators such as Diogenes Laertius (see below). There is also a strong criterion: if the author declares a philosophical purpose – be it didactic, apologetic, or therapeutic – in writing the letter and then proceeds to handle various philosophical topics and arguments, then we are being actively encouraged to treat it as a philosophical work, a piece of philosophical literature that utilises the format of the letter. We should, I feel, use the more conservative strong criterion as much as possible: we should look for certain obvious stylistic features in Cicero’s letters that identify them as ‘philosophical letters’.⁶⁸

⁶⁶ See further Inwood (2007a: 138–9).

⁶⁷ Pseudo-Demetrius himself declares that if one writes on topics such as logic or physics, or at extreme length, then the result is simply not a letter (231). He suggests that Plato’s letter to Dion’s friends (perhaps the *Seventh Letter*) and Aristotle’s letter to Alexander are examples of such ‘non-epistolary’ letters (234). Compare Cicero’s comment to Volumnius Eutrapelus in a letter from 46 BC: *tu vellem ne veritus esses ne pro libris legerem tuas litteras si mihi, quem ad modum scribis, longiores forte misisses* (*Fam.* 7.33.2 = 192 SB).

⁶⁸ This is not to say that those ‘philosophical letters’ we identify in the Ciceronian corpus do not also perform other social functions. Indeed, frequently much of the pay-off for

The most compelling stylistic features, it seems to me, are explicit declarations of philosophical aims and the imitation of the letters of earlier philosophers.

This, of course, means that only a very few of Cicero's letters can be distinguished as 'philosophical letters'. That does not imply, however, that other letters are not of real philosophical interest and value – many letters that contain philosophical allusions, references, and arguments but fail to meet the strong criterion remain integral to an appreciation of Cicero's philosophical life and legacy. At this point, then, it is worth elaborating further on the weak criterion.

It is significant that in antiquity letters were widely accepted as elements of a philosopher's oeuvre or legacy. Diogenes Laertius for one makes this especially clear, as he includes Ἐπιστολαί in the oeuvres of numerous major philosophers.⁶⁹ Note that merely being a letter from a philosopher could be sufficient for it to have a place in the oeuvre, the canon of texts that formed a philosopher's legacy – take, for instance, many of Epicurus' letters that detail apparently mundane things such as his daily food expenses (145 Usener), his encouragement for Polyaeus to participate in public festivals (157 Usener), and his gratitude for a shipment of grain (183 Usener). To be sure, letters that explicitly set out to convey technical philosophical arguments or philosophical advice naturally lend themselves to philosophical analysis and classification as 'philosophical letters'. But what about these other letters that seem to be normal elements of everyday social exchange taking place within expected cultural norms of self-presentation and communication, which are just the sort of letters that predominate in Cicero's collected correspondence?

classifying a letter as 'philosophical' is the extent to which it sheds more light on other aspects of Cicero's social and political behaviour.

⁶⁹ Diogenes Laertius includes letters in the oeuvres of Aristippus (2.84), Plato (3.50, 3.61–2), Speusippus (4.5), Aristotle (5.27), Theophrastus (5.46), Strato (5.60), Demetrius of Phalerum (5.81), Diogenes the Cynic (6.80; cf 6.101), Ariston (7.163), Sphaerus (7.178), and Epicurus (10.28). He also cites or quotes directly from, for example, the letters of Solon (1.64–7), Chilon (1.73), Pittacus (1.81), Cleobulus (1.93), Periander (1.99–100), Anacharsis (1.105), Epimenides (1.113–14), Pherecydes (1.122), Anaximenes (2.4–5), Crantor (4.27), and the Epicurean Hermarchus (10.15).

On the one hand, their canonisation might just be a result of an understandable interest in extraordinary personalities and biography, for which letters (then as now) hold a special place. On the other hand, there was in all likelihood a genuine philosophical interest in the more everyday or mundane letters written by philosophers: they were quite likely being presented or utilised as a form of ‘moral portraiture’⁷⁰ or philosophical (auto)biography, in which the philosopher illustrates, or personifies in his ‘everyday’ actions, his various interventions in his own social and political environment, certain modes of conduct and ethical characteristics. Such depictions are significant aspects of a philosopher’s legacy or public profile, regardless of how historically accurate they are. We need not worry too much whether Plato actually went to Syracuse to advise the tyrant Dionysius out of a concern to put his theory into practice (Plat. *Ep.* 7.327b6–329b7), or whether Epicurus actually died serenely despite the crippling pain afflicting his body (DL 10.22). What matters, it seems, is the image of the philosopher acting out his life in a certain way and how he is to be judged – can he be said to have led a good life and to have been a good man? A common concern among critics in antiquity is the extent to which the philosopher’s life accords with his philosophical tenets,⁷¹ and letters often provide a privileged, first-hand account of how there is genuine accord, despite appearances to the contrary. Thus, it might appear that Plato went off to serve a tyrant for personal gain and failed miserably, but in the *Seventh Letter* Plato demonstrates how he himself is faultless both in motive and for what results;⁷² and it would appear almost certain that Epicurus died in unbearable pain and suffering despite his claim to have attained *ataraxia*, but his deathbed letter to Idomeneus (DL 10.22) proves

⁷⁰ I borrow the phrase from Tsouna (2007: 86–7).

⁷¹ Probably the most famous example concerns the Pyrrhonian sceptics: can they consistently live in accordance with their professed scepticism? The actual lives and actions of adherents are often cited as evidence against their philosophical tenets; see further Burnyeat (1980). The caricatures of the Cynics, especially the extraordinary Diogenes, are also indicative of this common interest.

⁷² I discuss this in detail in chapter 2, section 2.4 below.

otherwise.⁷³ These letters invite positive moral or ethical judgments on the philosophers in question in the framework of their own (philosophical) convictions – personal consistency is the key. It does not seem unreasonable to read Cicero's letters, which are concerned enormously with his public image and self-presentation, with sensitivity to this philosophical epistolary tradition of 'moral portraiture'.

In each of the separate case studies I direct our attention to certain clues in specific letters – certain literary, philosophical, or stylistic markers in the text itself – that invite or encourage us to read them in the context of this tradition. I am confident that Cicero's letters support my interpretative approach on their own terms: my reading is premissed firmly on the literary art of the correspondence and so its effects can be attributed with some confidence to Cicero's own epistolary and philosophical practice. With a clear investigative method in hand, let us now proceed to our first case study, Cicero's exploration of the relationship between philosophy and politics in his letters from the 60s and 50s.

⁷³ Although Cicero in *De finibus* (2.96–101) seeks to show how the deathbed letter to Idomeneus is in fact at odds with Epicurus' own hedonist doctrine.

CHAPTER I

EXPLORING THE RELATIONSHIP BETWEEN PHILOSOPHY AND POLITICS

In the autobiographical prefaces to Cicero's philosophical dialogues and treatises there are obvious concerns about establishing a positive, legitimate place for philosophy in Roman political culture, as Cicero seeks to explain the nature of and reasons for his own philosophical practice. These concerns first appear in the three dialogues of the 50s – *De oratore*, *De republica*, and *De legibus*¹ – and they remain more or less consistent into the 40s.² They have been very well documented,³ but it is useful to be reacquainted briefly with some of the main issues.

First, Cicero takes care to legitimise his own leisure time or *otium*, in which he composed his philosophical works. In the 50s he presents himself as still politically active (in ways that befit his age) and as undertaking philosophical pursuits only in such legitimate periods of *otium* as arise from time to time (e.g., *De or.* 1.1–4, *Leg.* 1.8–13).⁴ In the 40s he stresses that his *otium* is understandable given Caesar's dictatorship (e.g., *DND* 1.7, *Acad.* 1.2). Throughout it is emphasised that his *otium* is of a special sort: *otium cum dignitate*, which he has earned from earlier political success and which has arisen from the normal practice of politics (e.g., *De or.* 1.1–4, *Rep.* 1.7–8, *Leg.* 1.10–11, *Fin.* 1.10, *Acad.* 1.11, *Div.* 2.7).⁵ Second, Cicero is careful to defend why he is doing philosophy, a typically Greek pursuit, in his *otium* (e.g., *De or.* 1.2–4, *Leg.* 1.5–9, *Fin.* 1.10–11, *DND* 1.6–7, *Acad.* 1.11–12, *Div.* 2.1). He offers

¹ Following Schmidt (1969), I accept that the *De legibus* was being composed, if not ultimately completed and published, between 52 and 50 BC.

² Note that the *Tusculans* are a major exception to the general rule; Gildenhard (2007) explores the reasons why this is the case.

³ See, for example, Douglas (1962: 41–2), Schmidt (1978–9), Fox (2007: 25–37), and Gildenhard (2007: 8–63) with detailed bibliography.

⁴ See further Gildenhard (2007: 48–51); also Zetzel (1995: 96–7; 2003).

⁵ For detailed discussion of Cicero's *otium cum dignitate*, see, for example, Boyancé (1948), Wirszubski (1954), Balsdon (1960), Fuhrmann (1960), and Dalfen (2000).

various reasons. He claims that his philosophical pursuits are a genuine form of public service directed at the greater good – the theory is intended for practical application (e.g., *Rep.* 1.10–13, *Leg.* 1.5, *Fin.* 1.11–12, *DND* 1.7–8, *Acad.* 1.11). He thus argues that his intellectual pursuits are becoming to that *otium* he does possess;⁶ they are not an escape from political life but a positive engagement in it.⁷ He also argues that the pursuit of philosophy is intrinsically valuable and without limit (*Fin.* 1.2–3); and, after the death of his daughter Tullia in 45, he argues that it offers him personal consolation (e.g., *Acad.* 1.11, *DND* 1.9). Third, Cicero is very keen to establish that there is a receptive Roman audience for his philosophical works. They are written for those without knowledge of Greek who are positively inclined towards philosophy, but also for those with Greek who appreciate fine Latin prose (e.g., *Acad.* 1.4–10, *DND* 1.8, *Fin.* 1.1–12). It is stressed that there is a real demand for philosophy at Rome, and that people could benefit from it. Throughout his philosophical dialogues and treatises Cicero develops a positive conception of the place and role of philosophy in Roman political culture.

In this chapter I demonstrate that Cicero had been engaging with such issues in his letters for some years before the composition and publication of his philosophical dialogues and treatises. First I focus on a famous open letter from December 54 BC (*Fam.* 1.9 = 20 SB), in which Cicero, drawing heavily on the Platonic letters, offers a role for philosophical theory in practical politics. In the second section I show how this contrasts with the general tenor of earlier letters to Atticus from before his exile in 58, in which philosophy is associated firmly with *otium* and a divorce from politics proper. In the third and fourth sections I return to *Epistulae ad familiares* 1.9 and consider what might explain this change in Cicero's presentation of the role of philosophy in political life.

⁶ Hall (1996) demonstrates how Cicero depicts aristocratic Romans doing philosophy in the dialogues, particularly *De oratore*, in such a way as to legitimise the nature of his own philosophical pursuits.

⁷ Gildenhard (2007: 51 n. 184) stresses that Cicero does not present his philosophical pursuits of the 50s as a withdrawal from political life under the triumvirs, citing a large number of scholars who maintain that his philosophical works are a substitute for practical action.

1.1 *Epistulae ad familiares* 1.9 and the Platonic letters

On the one hand, this chapter pursues its own distinct agenda. But it also performs an important programmatic function in the monograph as a whole. It provides essential background and a valuable contextual framework for the following investigations into letters of the late 50s and 40s. I begin in this chapter by dealing with quite general questions concerning the relationship between philosophy and politics, *otium* and the political life, and so forth; but in considering these general issues we are also introduced to particular topics that in subsequent years Cicero handles in noticeably more sophisticated, expansive, and sustained fashions and that form the focus of the other four chapters. For example, in *Epistulae ad familiares* 1.9 from December 54 BC we see Cicero's first use of the Platonic letters as a source and literary model, a topic that I explore in depth in [chapter 2](#) with regard to numerous letters to Atticus from early 49. We see, beginning in letters from the late 60s, Cicero's use of Plato and Socrates as exemplary models for political conduct, a practice that I discuss further in [chapters 2 and 4](#) with regard to letters from 49 and 46 respectively. In letters from April 59 we see Cicero first alluding to Dicaearchus' dispute with Theophrastus over the nature of the best life, which I examine in detail in [chapter 3](#). We also consider aspects of Cicero's interaction with other Roman intellectual figures like Atticus, who is prominent in [chapters 2 and 3](#), and Cato, who is central in [chapter 4](#). Looking forward, this first chapter is, therefore, intended to introduce us to a number of Cicero's philosophical preoccupations and to prompt and foreshadow the more detailed and technical philosophical discussions in the following four chapters.

1.1 *Epistulae ad familiares* 1.9 and the Platonic letters

Let us begin by examining *Epistulae ad familiares* 1.9. In this very lengthy letter, which is addressed to Lentulus Spinther, Cicero defends his recent life, particularly his actions since his return from exile. This letter is extraordinary because, as Lintott notes, it 'is easily recognizable as one intended for eyes other than that [*sic*] of its recipient'.⁸

⁸ Lintott (2008: 223). The letter's 'open' or 'public' nature is accepted more or less universally by scholars; see, for example, Hutchinson (1998: 113–14), who notes its

It was apparently written as an open *apologia* and reassurance to men such as Lentulus Spinther, who were *optimates* and who might have seen in Cicero's recent reconciliation with Caesar and defence of Publius Vatinius a startling shift of political allegiance (1.9.4–21).⁹ Much of the apology relies on the realities of Cicero's social position. For instance, he says that he was indebted to both Pompey and Caesar for a number of reasons and so could not honourably or reasonably deny Caesar's request to defend Vatinius (1.9.9–16). Also, Cicero's brother Quintus was Caesar's legate and had guaranteed to Pompey Cicero's acquiescence in politics (1.9.9, 21); again, it was a matter of personal honour that Cicero act with his brother's interests in mind (1.9.9–10). But in addition to these hard realities Cicero also appeals to tenets of political philosophy and practical ethics.¹⁰

Cicero cites Plato three times,¹¹ recalling in paraphrase passages from his *Laws* (1.9.12 ~ 711c),¹² *Seventh Letter* (1.9.18 ~ *Ep.* 7.331b5–d6),¹³ and *Fifth Letter* (1.9.18 ~ 5.322a4–c1).¹⁴ Given

similarity to the apologetic seventh Platonic letter; also Shackleton Bailey (1977–8: 1.307), Rawson (1983: 131), and Brunt (1986: 12).

⁹ Vatinius had already been the subject of Cicero's invective *In Vatinius* in 56 BC and the scorn of the poet Catullus (14); Cicero's decision to defend him reeked of political toadying. Cicero describes his defence as *res facilis* in a letter to his brother Quintus (2.16.3 = 20 SB). For further discussion of the episode, see Alexander (1990: 141–2) and Lintott (2008: 223–5). Despite its apologetic purpose, the letter is particularly striking for the force of its criticisms of the *optimates*. Much of the blame for Cicero's apparent volte-face is placed at their feet.

¹⁰ For analysis of the letter as a whole, see Lossmann (1962: 135–51), Mitchell (1969), and Büchner (1969, 1975), who usefully discusses some of the philosophical aspects.

¹¹ Also, Boes (1990: 290) notes that Cicero expresses sentiments that accord with Stoicism at 1.9.21.

¹² Although Cicero refers to Plato by name at 1.9.12, Shackleton Bailey (1977–8: 1.311) notes that Cicero's words *quales in re publica principes essent talis reliquos solere esse civis* are 'an almost exact translation of a passage in Xenophon's *Education of Cyrus* (8.8.5)', a work with which Cicero was most familiar and of which he was particularly enamoured (*Q. fr.* 1.1.23 = 1 SB, 1.2.7 = 2 SB, *Att.* 2.3.2 = 23 SB, *Fam.* 9.25.1 = 114 SB).

¹³ There is some dispute about the allusion at 1.9.18. Scholars usually just reference *Crito* 51b9–c3, in which similar sentiments are voiced. Lossmann (1962: 145) and Burkert (1965: 177–8), however, also refer the reader to the *Seventh Letter*, although they offer no argument for privileging this passage. I accept that Cicero alludes to the *Seventh Letter* because it is well suited to his apologetic project, and 1.9.18 corresponds more closely to *Ep.* 7.331b5–d6 than to the passage from the *Crito*; see page 40 below.

¹⁴ These are the earliest extant allusions to the Platonic letters in antiquity. Cicero also alludes to the *Seventh Letter* at *Att.* 9.10.2 = 177 SB, 9.13.4 = 180 SB (on which see chapter 2 below), and *Fin.* 2.92, *Tusc.* 5.100–1, in both these instances citing the passage concerning

the open and apologetic nature of the letter, Cicero presupposes a wide familiarity and sympathy on the part of his target audience, Lentulus Spinther and the aristocratic *optimates*, with these Platonic texts and the ideas and arguments therein.¹⁵ At no point does Cicero mention the name of the works, but only their author, whom he calls *Plato noster* at 1.9.12;¹⁶ it is assumed that the audience is highly familiar with the material.¹⁷ Of particular interest are Cicero's two allusions to the Platonic letters at 1.9.18.¹⁸ First, that to the *Seventh Letter*:

the immorality of the Sicilians (7.326b6–c5). And he alludes to the *Ninth Letter* on two occasions, both in contexts where he is discussing the natural duty one has towards others and one's fatherland (*Fin.* 2.45, *Off.* 1.22). There is of course always the possibility that earlier allusions to Plato's *Seventh Letter* have simply been lost. Diogenes Laertius (3.62) says that Aristophanes of Byzantium (late third century BC) listed *Epistles* in the canon of Platonic works. Diogenes also says that Thrasyllus (first century AD) includes *Epistles* in his canon, and Diogenes provides us with the names of all the addressees of these letters (3.61). Thrasyllus' *Epistles* match the thirteen we have today. Whether the two ancient collections correspond is indeterminable.

¹⁵ Note that Cicero and his contemporaries thought that the Platonic letters were in fact genuine works of Plato. This is most apparent at *Att.* 9.13.4 = 180 SB (on which see chapter 2, section 2.6 below) and also at *Tusc.* 5.100, where Cicero refers to the *Seventh Letter* as *praeclara epistola Platonis ad Dionem propinquos*. Indeed, almost everyone in antiquity from Cicero onwards appears to accept that the thirteen letters we have are genuine works of Plato. To be sure, in later antiquity there was doubt cast on the *Twelfth Letter* by an anonymous scholiast, and Olympiodorus records that Proclus rejected the letters on the basis of their style (*Proleg. in Plat. phil.* xxvi). In contrast, the question of authenticity has deeply worried modern scholars. There is an incredible literature on this topic, with a dazzling range of (predominately subjective) arguments and methods arrayed in support of either side. Harward (1932: 59–78) and Morrow (1962: 3–16) provide good surveys of the views presented in the earlier literature; Wohl (1998: 87 n. 1) provides a comprehensive bibliography. The debate is unresolved, but the majority of scholars think that all thirteen letters are spurious. The most interesting debate concerns the *Seventh Letter*, which has perhaps the best claim to authenticity; see Müller (1949), Stenzel (1953), Edelstein (1966: 70–121), von Fritz (1971), Glucker (1978: 41–7), Sayre (1988), and Gonzalez (1998). We need not worry ourselves overly much about the authenticity of the letters: whether they are forgeries or not does not change the fact that Cicero and his contemporaries thought that Plato himself composed them.

¹⁶ See Burkert (1965: 177) for further discussion of Cicero's frequent use of such familiar and eulogising phrases with respect to Plato (cf e.g., *Q. fr.* 1.1.29 = 1 SB, *Att.* 4.16.3 = 89 SB, *Rep.* 4.5, *Leg.* 3.5, 3.32, *DND* 2.32, *Tusc.* 4.71).

¹⁷ Cicero also makes an appeal to an episode from Terence's *Eunuch* (1.9.19), the force of which relies on a detailed shared knowledge of the plot of the play. Goldberg (2005: 87–96) argues that the quotation's effectiveness requires the audience to be an elite community who share 'intellectual capital'. The same point also applies to the Platonic allusions in this letter.

¹⁸ For discussion of the first allusion to Plato's *Laws*, see Boyancé (1970a: 250–3). He also makes useful comments on the allusion to the *Fifth Letter*, but he does not acknowledge the allusion to the *Seventh Letter*.

The relationship between philosophy and politics

itaque tota iam sapientium civium, qualem me et esse et numerari volo, et sententia et voluntas mutata esse debet. id enim iubet idem ille Plato, quo ego vehementer auctore moveor, tantum contendere in re publica quantum probare tuis civibus possis; vim neque parenti nec patriae adferre oportere. (Cicero, *Epistulae ad familiares* 1.9.18)

Thus, now both the manner of thinking and the disposition of wise citizens, such as I want myself both to be and to be counted among, must be changed entirely. Indeed, Plato, by whose authority I am moved very powerfully, himself decrees the same thing, namely to exert your political efforts as far as you are able to justify to your fellow-citizens; but one should not use force against either parent or fatherland.

Plato discusses the case of the parent at 7.331b4–c6, and then he makes an analogy with one's fatherland:

ταῦτόν δὴ καὶ περὶ πόλεως αὐτοῦ διανοούμενον χρή ζῆν τὸν ἔμφρονα· λέγειν μὲν, εἰ μὴ καλῶς αὐτῷ φαίνοιτο πολιτεύεσθαι, εἰ μέλλοι μῆτε ματαίως ἔρεῖν μῆτε ἀποθανεῖσθαι λέγων, βίαν δὲ πατρίδι πολιτείας μεταβολῆς μὴ προσφέρειν, ὅταν ἄνευ φυγῆς καὶ σφαγῆς ἀνδρῶν μὴ δυνατόν ᾖ γίγνεσθαι τὴν ἀρίστην, ἡσυχίαν δὲ ἄγοντα εὐχεσθαι τὰ ἀγαθὰ αὐτῷ τε καὶ τῇ πόλει. (Plato, *Epistles* 7.331c6–d5)

Indeed, it is also necessary for the sensible man to live holding the same view concerning his own polis: he ought to speak, on the one hand, if it seems to him not to be governed finely, if he will not accomplish nothing or be condemned to die by speaking; but, on the other hand, he ought not to apply force against his fatherland in the form of political revolution, whenever it is not possible to bring about the best constitution without banishing and slaughtering men, but rather, staying quiet, he ought to pray for the good of himself and the polis.

Immediately following in Cicero's letter is the allusion to the *Fifth Letter*:

atque hanc quidem ille causam sibi ait non attingendae rei publicae fuisse, quod, cum offendisset populum Atheniensem prope iam desipientem senectute cumque eum nec persuadendo nec cogendo regi vidisset, cum persuaderi posse diffideret, cogi fas esse non arbitraretur. mea ratio fuit alia, quod neque desipiente populo nec integra re mihi ad consulendum capesseremne rem publicam implicatus tenebar; sed laetatus tamen sum quod mihi liceret in eadem causa et mihi utilia et cuivis bono recta defendere. (Cicero, *Epistulae ad familiares* 1.9.18)

And in fact he [Plato] says that in his case there was this reason for not being bound to undertake political activity, because, when he found the people of Athens already nearly witless in old age, and when he saw that they were ruled

1.1 *Epistulae ad familiares* 1.9 and the Platonic letters

neither with persuasion nor compulsion, although he thought that they could not be persuaded, he did not consider compulsion to be right. My way of thinking was different, since neither was the populace witless, nor was it an open matter for me to decide whether to take up politics, I was under a commitment. But, nevertheless, I was happy because I was allowed to champion a cause both expedient to myself and proper for any good man.

In the *Fifth Letter* Plato replies to the charge that he claimed to know what is advantageous for democracy, but never himself spoke before the *demos* and gave it wise counsel:

πρὸς ταῦτ' εἰπεῖν ἔστιν ὅτι Πλάτων ὁψὲ ἐν τῇ πατρίδι γέγονεν καὶ τὸν δῆμον κατέλαβεν ἤδη πρεσβύτερον καὶ εἰθισμένον ὑπὸ τῶν ἔμπροσθεν πολλὰ καὶ ἀνόμοια τῇ ἐκείνου συμβουλῇ πράττειν· ἐπεὶ πάντων ἂν ἡδιστα καθάπερ πατρὶ συνεβούλευεν αὐτῷ, εἰ μὴ μάτην μὲν κινδυνεύσειν ὥετο, πλεον δ' οὐδὲν ποιήσῃν. (Plato, *Epistles* 5.322a7–b4)

To this there is the reply that Plato was born late in the life of his fatherland and he found the people already rather old and accustomed by those who came before to do many things quite unlike the counsel of that man. He would have given counsel to it, like to his father, with every possible pleasure, if he did not think that he would be running risks in vain, and that he would do no good.

These allusions form part of Cicero's defence for his current pursuit of the political life in support of Caesar. In 1.9.21 he writes: *accepisti quibus rebus adductus quamque rem causamque defenderim quique meus in re publica sit pro mea parte capes-senda status* ('You have heard for what reasons I defend each particular case and cause and what my position is in public affairs according to which I play my part in politics'). We see here a novel development in Cicero's use of the Platonic letters and the introduction of the historical figure of Plato as a model for political conduct. Before this letter we have no clear or explicit evidence of such use of the Platonic epistles, in the Academy or elsewhere.¹⁹

In the passage from the *Seventh Letter* Plato insists that one must adjust one's political conduct to befit the present circumstances; a point that Cicero reiterates in 1.9.18, when he states that

¹⁹ In [chapter 2](#) below we shall see how Cicero employs these resources in a sustained fashion in his letters to Atticus from early 49 BC. Also, Boyancé (1970a: 254) notes that they are important resources for later Neoplatonic writers.

wise citizens must change their views as circumstances dictate and that Plato himself decrees this.²⁰ Plato elaborates on this in the *Seventh Letter*: one should speak out against bad rule so long as it is not a useless or a dangerous enterprise. But he also strongly rejects political revolution, civil bloodshed, and even speaking out against bad rulers, if conditions are dangerous or unfavourable, in favour of staying quiet and praying for the good of the state. The conditional language is most significant: given a certain set of circumstances, one should pursue a certain course of action over another, but under no circumstances should one turn to civil bloodshed as a means to overthrow bad rule.

Being prepared to adjust to circumstances is a key premiss that Cicero presents in his own defence.²¹ At 1.9.21 he makes this absolutely clear:

<neque> permanendum in una sententia conversis rebus ac bonorum voluntatibus mutatis, sed temporibus adsendendum. numquam enim <in> praestantibus in re publica gubernanda viris laudata est in una sententia perpetua permansio. (Cicero, *Epistulae ad familiares* 1.9.21)

Nor should I hold on to one opinion when things have changed and the attitudes of good men have altered, but I should move with the times. For holding on to one opinion unerringly has never been praised in men preeminent in governing the state.

To be sure, in the passage from the *Fifth Letter* Plato himself is depicted as following this principle in his own political conduct: because Athens was set in its ways and in no fit state to be persuaded, the life of political action was not worth pursuing. Thus, although Plato admits that he would have chosen the political life if the citizen body of Athens had been in a fit state to be persuaded, given the conditions abstention was the best policy.²² Cicero concurs with Plato's point in the *Seventh Letter* about the need to adjust to circumstances, but he stresses that in his particular case at Rome the relevant conditions were significantly

²⁰ In contrast, at *Crito* 51b9–c3 things are inflexible: it is not clear that one should adjust to circumstances. On this basis, we should accept that here Cicero is alluding specifically to the *Seventh Letter* and not to the *Crito*.

²¹ Compare chapter 4, section 4.4 below.

²² This would not, of course, stop Plato from giving political advice to politicians, kings, and citizens in other city-states, to which the thirteen Platonic letters bear testament.

different from those which Plato himself encountered at Athens and which were noted in the *Fifth Letter*.

Although the *optimates* may have wished that he abstain from politics and from dealing with Caesar, Cicero stresses that he was in no position to do so. He strongly rules out active opposition to Caesar: the allusion to the *Seventh Letter* in particular makes the point that this is not what one should do if it would be dangerous and without a good chance of success; and at the extreme level it would require the use of compulsion or even military force, which is outlawed by Plato. Cicero implies that such a course of action is both dangerous and has little or no chance of success, since the *optimates* have lost the support of their fellow citizens.²³ He insists, furthermore, that his decision was not straightforward in philosophical terms: the Romans were not witless nor unable to be persuaded, so he could not abstain on this ground, as Plato did; nor was Rome a well-functioning state, which would have made the choice to pursue the political life obvious. Rather, Cicero claims that he was bound owing to circumstances beyond his immediate control, namely his prior entanglement with political affairs, to continue now to pursue the political life. Given these circumstances, his decision was not merely expedient but indeed the right thing to do. Scholars have found this a somewhat surprising claim. Shackleton Bailey, for example, concludes uneasily that ‘while excusing his support for the dynasts as imposed on him by circumstances, especially the unworthiness of the *optimates*, Cicero yet wishes to present it as respectable *per se*’.²⁴ Actually, Cicero presents it as respectable (*cuivis bono recta*) not *per se*, but in as much as it is a decision and course of action properly and consistently derived from the framework of the authoritative Platonic philosophy; that is the key point of 1.9.18. And yet, via the comparison with the actions of Plato, Cicero hints that he himself would act as Plato did if he could, if circumstances were different. Thus, Cicero simultaneously explains his active involvement in Caesarian politics, suggests

²³ See Büchner (1969: 239–44). He suggests that this can be read not only as censure of the *optimates*, but also as genuine support for Caesar, for the good of the *res publica*.

²⁴ Shackleton Bailey (1977–8: 1.313).

that he in fact would prefer to be independent, free of such entanglements so that he might pursue *otium cum dignitate*,²⁵ and so apologises to those concerned at his recent conduct.

It is significant that Cicero explains his decision to pursue the political life (in support of Caesar) in a philosophical framework and in explicitly Platonic terms. Evidently Cicero was prepared to present himself to a wider Roman audience openly in the guise of a follower of Plato, as a *homo Platonicus* (cf Quintus Cicero, *Com. Pet.* 46),²⁶ in this case taking that to mean that it is proper to weigh circumstances and adjust his conduct accordingly. In this instance, this characterisation serves an obvious apologetic purpose: what might appear to be a volte-face is in fact consistency on his part; indeed, given the relevant circumstances, his involvement in politics is the right thing to do.

In addition to this apologetic argument, at this point of his letter Cicero raises significant points about the relationship between philosophy and politics. The Platonic letters, with which Cicero presumes the audience of this letter to be familiar, highlight key principles concerning *the philosopher's* political conduct.²⁷ Plato in the *Fifth Letter* is particularly concerned with the conditions required for the philosopher's successful pursuit of politics: for philosophy to be useful in the political realm, and for the philosopher to be motivated to involve himself in politics, it is vital for there to be a receptive subject audience open to persuasion.²⁸ Further, it is implied in the *Fifth Letter* that the philosopher would employ his political theory in practical politics if given the chance. Indeed, in the *Seventh Letter* Plato makes it clear that the opportunity to do just this is what motivated him to go to

²⁵ Note especially *Fam.* 1.9.21: *cum omnibus nobis in administranda re publica propositum esse debeat, id quod a me saepissime dictum est, cum dignitate otium, non idem semper dicere sed idem semper spectare debemus.*

²⁶ See Boyancé (1970b: 226).

²⁷ For critical discussion of Plato and practical politics, and the extent to which the Platonic letters and later sources can shed light on Plato's real attitudes on the issue, see further Brunt (1993: 282–342) with bibliography and Schofield (2000b). I agree with them both that we must be cautious when using this likely spurious material to judge Plato's own views; however, for Cicero and his contemporaries these letters were genuine and thus accurate reflections of Plato's own views.

²⁸ Boyancé (1970a: 254–5) notes that we can take this as a general principle, not specific only to Plato.

Syracuse as philosophic advisor to the younger Dionysius (7.328b6–c2), and he stresses that successful implementation of his theory would realise on earth every good (7.337c7–d2).²⁹ The passage from the *Fifth Letter* to which Cicero alludes is Plato's reply to the criticism that his theory is not applicable in practice, because he himself claims to know what is best, but abstains from politics in Athens (5.322a4–7).³⁰ Plato argues that it is applicable – and his conviction is clear in the advice he gives to Euphraeus and Perdiccas in the *Fifth Letter* itself, as well as from his own actions in Sicily and his advice to various others recounted in the other Platonic letters – but it is also necessary that the audience not be old and daft like the citizen body of Athens. Plato presents philosophy not as a pursuit by nature detached from politics nor limited to leisure time but, on the contrary, as having a natural place at the heart of political affairs: the philosopher is always looking for a suitable opportunity to engage in politics.

These Platonic letters present an authoritative and positive account of the relationship between philosophy and politics; they contain a vision for the philosopher's role in practical politics. Cicero draws on this picture and appropriates these Platonic principles in this open letter. He makes the point that the Romans are not witless and unable to be persuaded like the citizen body of Athens, which implies not only that political engagement is a genuine option for him personally, but also that the Romans are a receptive audience for philosophical argument about what is best for the *res publica*. His philosophical activities at this time now become very significant. Indeed, they are highlighted later in this letter (1.9.23), where Cicero says that he is turning now from oratory to the 'gentler Muses' he favoured in his youth, namely philosophy, and recommends his recently published *De oratore* to Lentulus Spinther's son.³¹ We are encouraged to see Cicero in his philosophical guise

²⁹ See further [chapter 2, section 2.4](#) below.

³⁰ This was a charge levelled at Plato and the Academy in 353 BC by Isocrates (*Antidosis* xv, 79–84, 258–69, 283). See Bury (1929: 471–5), Edelstein (1966: 62), and Brunt (1993: 286–7, 301).

³¹ *De oratore* had been published only a few months earlier (*Att.* 4.13.2 = 87 SB, 4.16.1–3 = 89 SB). There is no mention of *De republica* in *Fam.* 1.9. Cicero seems to have started the dialogue in May 54 (*Q. fr.* 2.12.1 = 16 SB, 3.5.1–2 = 25 SB, *Att.* 4.14.1 = 88 SB).

as author of the dialogues; he is roughly in Plato's position – a 'philosopher' in a political tight spot where his course of action is very hard to justify – and he is carefully drawing attention to the parallel in this special apologetic letter. Cicero's philosophical practice now appears strongly Platonic, not just in terms of his debt to Plato's literary form, but also in terms of its political application.

Indeed, Cicero's entire philosophical enterprise relies on there being a receptive Roman audience. Via the allusion to Plato's *Fifth Letter* Cicero emphasises that there is such an audience at Rome, and simultaneously he actively appeals to those with the philosophical knowledge and sensitivities to appreciate fully the force of the Platonic allusions. Although the state is currently dysfunctional, it is redeemable because of the receptive nature of her citizens; and moreover, it is implied, Cicero himself can be the state's redeemer, not by riskily standing up to the triumvirs and fostering civil discord and violence, which he notes Plato outlaws in the *Seventh Letter*, but via the philosophical activities he is now undertaking.³² Clearly Cicero engages in Caesarian politics for various pragmatic reasons, such as his prior entanglement in affairs outside his control and personal obligations, but it is suggested that it is also a principled philosophical engagement, sanctioned by the *auctoritas* of Plato,³³ for the good of all Romans.³⁴ Given the apologetic nature of the letter, Cicero expects the audience to respond positively to this Platonic self-fashioning and to be supportive of the parallels he draws between his philosophical and political practice and that pursued and advocated by Plato.

1.2 Dissociation: early letters to Atticus

This positive picture of the relationship between philosophy and politics in *Epistulae ad familiares* 1.9 from December 54 BC

Boyancé (1970a) argues that this letter anticipates some of the key themes of *De republica*.

³² See further chapter 3, section 3.6 below.

³³ Cicero's case seems to presume a certain general understanding, and acceptance, of Plato's authority among his Roman audience.

³⁴ Thus Cicero explains his support for Caesar because it is for the good of the *res publica*, as Büchner (1969: 239–44) suggests.

differs from what we see in some earlier letters to Atticus. In these, Cicero presents philosophical pursuits as being located firmly in *otium* and dissociated strongly from political life.

This is particularly evident in an intense series of letters from April 59 BC (2.4–17 = 24–37 SB),³⁵ a month when Caesar sought for the second time as consul to pass a controversial agrarian reform bill that would have seen redistribution of land to Pompey's veterans (2.16.1–2).³⁶ Cicero had decided to challenge the first version of the bill in late 60 (2.3.3–4), and he delivered a defence speech on behalf of Gaius Antonius in early 59 that included criticism of the triumvirs, displayed openly his opposition to the contemporary state of politics (*De domo* 41), and increased the political pressure.³⁷ He avoided involvement in the political intrigue surrounding the second version. Rather, in 2.16.3 Cicero emotively heralds his return to the splendid studies of his youth (*qua re incumbamus, o noster Tite, ad illa praeclara studia, et eo unde discedere non oportuit aliquando revertamur*),³⁸ when by his own admission he pursued philosophical activities and avoided politics (*Brut.* 303–22).³⁹ In this letter he professes to be returning to *studia* ('intellectual pursuits') and *quies* ('retirement from public life'), which he identifies with Theophrastus' *theōrētikos bios* as opposed to Dicaearchus' *praktikos bios*.⁴⁰ This sharp distinction between practical politics and intellectual pursuits also appears when Cicero signs off 2.12: καὶ Κικέρων ὁ φιλόσοφος τὸν πολιτικὸν Τίτον ἀσπάζεται ('And Cicero the philosopher bids Atticus the statesman farewell', 2.12.4).⁴¹ In 2.6,

³⁵ Unless otherwise indicated, all references in this section are to the *Epistulae ad Atticum*.

³⁶ For detailed discussion of the political climate, see Gelzer (1969: 105–34) and Stockton (1971: 153–75).

³⁷ See Stockton (1971: 168–9). This speech appears to have precipitated the adoption of the patrician Publius Clodius Pulcher by the plebeian Publius Fonteius and aided Cicero's subsequent demise and exile.

³⁸ The text of 2.16.3 is presented in full at the start of [chapter 3](#) below.

³⁹ This also fits with Plutarch's account of Cicero's life during the reign of Sulla (*Cic.* 3.3, 4.3–4).

⁴⁰ Cicero reports *tanta controversia* between the two at 2.16.3; on the dispute and the nature of these modes of life, see the detailed discussion in [chapter 3](#), [sections 3.1–3.3](#) below.

⁴¹ The joke rests on Atticus' appreciation of Dicaearchus, the exponent of the political life, to which Cicero has alluded at 2.2.2 = 22 SB and 2.12.4, and Cicero's own reading of Theophrastus' *On Ambition* at this time (2.3.4 = 23 SB, 2.9.2). It also rests on the fact that Atticus at this time was at Rome (2.6.2), if not involving himself in

likewise, Cicero rejects the political life in favour of literary pursuits:

hic, hic nimirum πολιτευτέον. nam istic non solum non licet sed etiam taedet. itaque ἀνέκδοτα a nobis, quae tibi uni legamus, Theopompio genere aut etiam asperiore multo pangentur. neque aliud iam quicquam πολιτεύομαι nisi odisse improbos, et id ipsum nullo cum stomacho sed potius cum aliqua †scribendi† voluptate. (Cicero, *Epistulae ad Atticum* 2.6.2)

Here [at Antium], here certainly one should practise politics. There [at Rome] it is not only not permitted but also wearisome. Thus, ‘private works’ will be composed by me, in the manner of Theopompus or even much rougher, which I shall read to you alone. And now I pursue no political activity except hating the bastards, and that itself I do not with anger but rather with some pleasure (in the writing?).

The vocabulary in this passage is reminiscent of the question ‘should the wise man practise politics?’, which was a standard issue of debate with respect to the question of the best mode of life.⁴² In particular, the Greek terms πολιτευτέον and πολιτεύομαι suggest that Cicero is engaging directly with this question. His reasoning is conditional: he stresses that, given the present conditions at Rome, he is right to pursue a mode of life distinct from politics.⁴³

politics then at least being at the heart of public affairs. See further Watt (1962: 258) and White (2001: 216).

⁴² See Schofield (1991: 119–27); also chapter 3, section 3.3.1 below. On the state of the debate in the first century BC, see especially Bénatouïl (2007), and Joly (1956) more generally.

⁴³ We have seen in section 1.1 above that in *Fam.* 1.9 (= 20 SB) Cicero employs a conditional mode of reasoning when deliberating on whether he should engage in politics: there the principle that one should adjust to circumstances is paramount for Cicero. This conditional mode of reasoning also appears in numerous later letters, as we shall see in the following three chapters, at times with explicit reference to the Platonic epistles (chapter 2, sections 2.3–2.6) and at times with explicit reference to Plato (chapter 4, sections 4.1 and 4.4). It is difficult, however, to attribute Cicero’s conditional reasoning to a particular philosophical school or to detect an exclusive philosophical allegiance with respect to his deliberations on whether to engage in politics. All the Hellenistic schools ultimately seem to have advocated this sort of conditional stance on the question. The Epicureans maintained that in normal conditions the wise man would not practise politics (8, 551 Usener; Epic. SV 58), but in exceptional circumstances he would (Sen. *De otio* 3.2; Cic. *Rep.* 1.10; DL 10.120; cf 9, 548, 554 Usener); see further Schofield (2000a: 437–43), Roskam (2007: 29–66, 120–5), McConnell (2010), and Fish (2011). The Stoics maintained that in normal circumstances the wise man would practise politics (Cic. *Fin.* 3.68; Sen. *De otio* 3.2–3; DL 7.121, 7.131; SVF 3.686, 3.698, 3.702), but in exceptional circumstances he would not (Sen. *De otio* 8.1–4; SVF 3.690, 3.694);

1.2 Dissociation: early letters to Atticus

In each letter from April 59 BC Cicero refers to his rural retirement at Antium and the fact that he was writing and studying while avoiding active involvement in politics at Rome (2.4–17). But he was not composing anything obviously relevant to politics: he had started but abandoned a *De geographia* that had involved him reading a number of specialised works on the subject (2.2.2 = 22 SB, 2.4.1–3, 2.6.1, 2.7.1),⁴⁴ and he was being pressured by Atticus to undertake a big philosophical project, something, in the words of Atticus, *magnum* and *multae cogitationis atque otii* (‘needing much thought and leisure time’, 2.14.2).⁴⁵ There is mention in 2.6.2 of vituperative political satire, ἀνέκδοτα in the fashion of Theopompus;⁴⁶ but these will be private between Cicero and Atticus (*quae tibi uni legamus*), deliberately separated from the public sphere. These letters suggest that philosophy and intellectual studies are pursuits undertaken in *otium* and that they are not an intervention or engagement in politics.

To be sure, in these letters from April 59 BC Cicero frequently both seeks information and comments on the political situation from a distance; but he is careful to affirm his commitment to stay out of practical politics: *atque haec sic velim existimes, non me abs te κατὰ τὸ πρακτικὸν quaerere, quod gestiat animus aliquid agere in re publica* (‘But please understand that I do not ask you these things for any practical reason, because my spirit is itching

see further Reedy (1994), Schofield (2000a: 443–53), and Parrish (2007: 40–2). The Academics also appear to have had a conditional stance on whether the wise man will practise politics. Stobaeus’ report of Philo of Larissa’s stance on ethical issues (2.40.22–41.13 Wachsmuth) suggests this, on which see further Brittain (2001: 255–95), as do the Platonic letters just considered in section 1.1 above, if we consider them to be Academic texts. We shall see in more detail in chapter 3 below that the Peripatetics Theophrastus and Dicaearchus had strong views on either side of the issue.

⁴⁴ This plan appears to have been aborted owing to the technical and monotonous nature of the subject matter (2.6.1).

⁴⁵ Cicero humorously excuses himself by pleading that *otium* and weighty philosophical pursuits are presently impossible. He jokes that this is so because the life of *otium* and rural retirement has become too popular given the tough political situation at Rome – there are now too many garrulous philosophers about (2.14.1–2, 2.15.3)!

⁴⁶ The works of the fourth-century BC historian Theopompus were noted for their scathing and critical tone in assessing political behaviour; see Shackleton Bailey (1965–70: 1.364). Interestingly, a number of scholars have seen in his works Cynic philosophical ideas, and Murray (1946a) in fact labels him ‘the Cynic historian’; see further Pédech (1989: 231–41) and Moles (1995: 147).

to take some part in public affairs', 2.7.4).⁴⁷ There is a clear distinction between interest in politics and intellectual pursuits on the one hand and practical politics, the pursuit and execution of political office, on the other.

It is worth noting that Cicero presents himself and Atticus as personifying this distinction in their own life stories. Via close analysis of the *Epistulae ad Atticum*, Benferhat illustrates how Cicero considers Atticus, a professed Epicurean, to be an exemplar of the life of *otium* devoted to literary and intellectual pursuits, even though he is still involved in politics in certain ways, for instance as a political supporter and banker.⁴⁸ She argues persuasively that Atticus was interested in politics, as well as being associated closely with a number of key political figures, but did not wish to be involved in executing public office himself and throughout his life appears to have exercised a careful neutrality.⁴⁹ Cicero's identification of Atticus with the life of *otium* is presented most vividly in 1.17 (= 17 SB), written in 61 BC and designed to reconcile Atticus with Cicero's brother Quintus. In this letter Cicero stresses the intimacy he shares with Atticus and portrays him as both a foil to himself and a kindred spirit (1.17.5–7).⁵⁰ He presents them both as possessing traditional Roman virtues and frequent reference is made to Atticus' political *consilium* ('advice' or 'insight') (1.17.5–6). But Atticus does not possess *ambitio quaedam* ('a sort of ambition'), whereas Cicero does (1.17.5). None the less, Cicero stresses that they are both essentially the same, only really differing in the modes of life they have chosen: *neque ego inter me atque te quicquam interesse umquam duxi praeter voluntatem institutae vitae* ('I have never considered there to be any difference between you and me except in the choice of mode of life'); Cicero has opted for the pursuit of political office on the *cursus honorum* (*honorum studium*) and Atticus has opted for *honestum otium* (1.17.5). Here *honestum*

⁴⁷ Note that the phrase κατὰ τὸ πρακτικόν in 2.7.4 resonates with the Dicaearchian *praktikos bios* in 2.16.3.

⁴⁸ Benferhat (2005: 104–8, 114–28). ⁴⁹ Benferhat (2005: 131–69).

⁵⁰ Compare 1.18.1 and 1.18.3 = 18 SB. Cicero calls Atticus his *alter ego* in 3.15.4 = 60 SB: *me enim ipsum multo magis accuso, deinde te quasi me alterum*. On Cicero's use of the *topos*, see further Lossmann (1962: 33–51).

otium ('honourable leisure') refers to a positive Roman mode of life, which might involve interest in politics and public affairs as well as literary and intellectual pursuits, but is free from active pursuit of political office.⁵¹

Indeed, throughout early letters to Atticus, Cicero presents philosophical pursuits not as a means of engaging in politics but as a refuge, an escape from it.⁵² In letters from before his consulship he writes excitedly of acquiring libraries and setting up his own Academy at his villa in Tusculum, in anticipation of retiring fully from politics (1.1.5, 1.3.2, 1.4.3, 1.6.2, 1.7, 1.8.2, 1.9.2, 1.10.3, 1.11.3 = 2–10 SB). In these letters *otium* and philosophical pursuits are associated intimately with old age. In April 59 BC this is again made clear, with Cicero's use of *taedere* in 2.6.2 and 2.7.4 highlighting the weariness of age as he abstains from politics. It is evident, however, that *otium* and philosophy in old age are earned with earlier prowess in politics. Cicero stresses this in 2.16.3, for instance, when he writes that he is opting for intellectual pursuits because he has already satisfied Dicaearchus (*puto enim me Dicaearcho adfatim satis fecisse*): he has been a good citizen, climbed the *cursus honorum*, saved the *res publica*, and has thus earned *otium cum dignitate* (cf 2.3.4 = 23 SB, 2.7.4, 2.9.2). But it none the less requires retirement from politics – not just retirement from the pursuit of political office on the *cursus honorum*, but also retirement from the role of old, distinguished

⁵¹ Shackleton Bailey (1965: 1.5) describes it as 'perfectly respectable' even though one 'preferred to keep out of the race for office'. In this letter itself Cicero says explicitly that Atticus should not be criticised for his preference (1.17.5, 7; cf *Off.* 1.69–73). This positive attitude towards the Roman life of *honestum otium* differs from the criticism directed at those people, such as the Epicureans, who pursue a life of idle, detached *otium*; see further section 1.3 below. It seems that Cicero did not take Atticus' professed Epicureanism as indicative of his actual mode of life. Indeed, Cicero often gently mocks Atticus for not living up to his commitment to the life of *otium* because of his dalliances into practical politics: for example the joke we have seen at 2.12.4 and also 4.6.1 = 83 SB, where Cicero declares him to be a political animal rather than a real Epicurean; compare 7.2.4 = 125 SB and *Fam.* 13.1.5 = 63 SB. For analysis of Atticus' Epicurean credentials, see further Boissier (1897: 131–58), Rawson (1985: 100–1), and Benferhat (2005: 98–169).

⁵² This is a well-recognised motif throughout Cicero's writings. For further discussion, see, for example, Schmidt (1978–9), Wood (1988: 55–61), and Fox (2007: 30–7); Leeman and Pinkster (1981: 17–21) collate the substantial evidence for Cicero's association of philosophical pursuits with refuge from politics.

ex-consul in the senate. This is reaffirmed in a later letter. In February 55 Cicero writes to Lentulus Spinther that, given the current political situation, he would most like to pursue a life of intellectual studies (*studia et litterae*, *Fam.* 1.8.3 = 19 SB) and that *otium nobis exoptandum est* ('we must pray for *otium*', 1.8.4). He justifies this by stressing that a dignified traditional role as an independent ex-consul in the senate is impossible under the new political order, and hence such a life of intellectual pursuits is now the best option (1.8.3–4).

On the one hand, it is suggested that one might retreat into the refuge of philosophy willingly. On the other hand, in April 59 BC Cicero highlights how political adversity can force one into this refuge unwillingly. In 2.16.3 he professes to be turning towards *studia* and *quies* because *nunc prorsus hoc* ('now things are so'). It is implied that he would not have given up practical politics if conditions had not become impossible. But, regardless of one's willingness, philosophical pursuits are still a clear disengagement from politics. It is suggested in 2.7.4 that they are not a means to engage in political dissidence or subversion:

iam pridem gubernare me taedebat etiam cum licebat; nunc vero, cum cogar exire de navi non abiectis sed ereptis gubernaculis, cupio istorum naufragia ex terra intueri, cupio, ut ait tuus amicus Sophocles, 'καὶν ὑπὸ στέγῃ / πυκνῆς ἀκούειν ψακάδος εὐδούσῃ φρενί'. (Cicero, *Epistulae ad Atticum* 2.7.4)

Already, long ago, I was weary of skippering, even when it was allowed. Now, in truth, when I am compelled to leave the ship, not having thrown away the helm but having had it ripped from my hands, I want to watch their shipwreck from dry land. I desire, as your friend Sophocles says, 'to listen to the rain pouring down under cover with a closed mind'.

Cicero would have stayed on the ship at the helm if he had been allowed, even though he was weary of it. He did not give up the role willingly but has had the helm ripped from his hands (cf 2.3.3–4, 2.5.1–2, 2.9.1–3). The images of Cicero safe on dry land while the ship of state heads for the rocks, and sheltering from the storm of political life, expressed here via the Sophoclean quotation,⁵³

⁵³ Shackleton Bailey (1965–70: 1.367) notes that the passage is from a lost play, *Tympnistae*. Compare Plato, *Rep.* 496d5–e2.

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convey that he is fully detached from politics. He is not pursuing a subversive political role on board, nor is he seeking to retake the helm. In fact, it is implied that his life at Antium and his *studia* are so dissociated from politics that he is not even affected by political disaster, the wreck of the *res publica*.⁵⁴

This general association of philosophy with retirement and leisure does not prevent the regular appearance of philosophical allusions in the letters of the time. To be sure, philosophy is still presented as a useful tool for thinking about ethics and political conduct, but in a reflective and disinterested rather than active or engaged fashion. Consider the following letter, written in late 60 BC, when Cicero was deliberating on how to act with respect to Caesar's first agrarian reform bill:

venio nunc ad mensem Ianuarium et ad ὑπόστασιν nostram ac πολιτείαν, in qua Σωκρατικῶς εἰς ἑκάτερον, sed tamen ad extremum, ut illi solebant, τὴν ἀρέσκουσιν. est res sane magni consili. nam aut fortiter resistendum est legi agrariae, in quo est quaedam dimicatio sed plena laudis, aut quiescendum, quod est non dissimile atque ire in Solonium aut Antium, aut etiam adiuvandum, quod a me aiunt Caesarem sic expectare ut non dubitet (Cicero, *Epistulae ad Atticum* 2.3.3)

I come now to the month of January and to my plan and course of policy, in which I shall argue on each side in a Socratic fashion, but nevertheless in the end, as those men were accustomed to do, I shall state my position. It is certainly a matter for great consideration. For either one must resist strongly the agrarian law, in which there is a certain struggle but one full of worth, or one must keep quiet, which is not unlike going to Solonium or Antium, or one must in fact lend one's assistance, which is just what they say Caesar expects from me so strongly that he does not waver.

Throughout this letter Cicero uses a large number of technical Greek philosophical terms: Σωκρατικῶς εἰς ἑκάτερον is the most explicit and important example in this passage.⁵⁵ Cicero frequently

⁵⁴ Fantham (1972: 22–6) shows how Cicero often refers to political disaster and the collapse of the *res publica* in terms of shipwreck.

⁵⁵ In particular, note that in the preceding part of the letter (2.3.2) Cicero discusses optics in the context of some window design at his villa. Here he uses technical Greek reminiscent of mathematical or geometrical reasoning: ἔστω θψις μὲν Α, τὸ δὲ ὁρώμενον <τὸ> ΒΓ, ἀκτῖνες δὲ ἰΑΙΤΑ†. There follows a humorous critique of the Epicurean notion of εἶδωλα. It is clear that the letter has a marked, almost self-conscious, philosophical atmosphere.

associates the Socratic method of arguing *in utramque partem* ('on both sides of the question') with Academic practice in general terms (e.g., *Acad.* 1.44–6, *Fin.* 2.1–4, *DND* 1.11, *Fat.* 1–4, *De or.* 3.68),⁵⁶ and at *Tusculans* 5.11 he explicitly identifies the Socratic method with that of the Academic sceptics: it is a method of questioning whereby *in omni disputatione quid esset simillimum veri quaereremus* ('in every discussion we search for what is closest to the truth'), and Cicero associates it especially with Carneades (cf *Acad.* 2.7).⁵⁷ Griffin sees this reference in *Epistulae ad Atticum* 2.3.3 as positive evidence for Cicero's sceptical 'Philonian position' at this time,⁵⁸ against the view of Glucker and Steinmetz, who argue that Cicero was in 60 BC an adherent to the Antiochean Old Academy.⁵⁹ It is not entirely clear that Cicero is highlighting his own philosophical allegiance, however. The phrase *ut illi solebant* is in the past tense, and *illi* in particular suggests that Cicero is not usually identified with this group but is specially adopting their practice. In contrast, when referring to the Academic sceptics and the sceptical method in his later philosophical works he uses the present tense and the first person. For instance, in the line quoted from *Tusculans* 5.11 above, Cicero uses the first person plural imperfect subjunctive *quaereremus* ('we search') when describing the sceptical method (cf *DND* 1.11–12).⁶⁰ Perhaps this letter really offers an indication of the disappearance of the sceptical New Academy from the philosophical scene after the death of Philo in 83 BC, to which Cicero alludes at *De natura deorum* 1.6 and 1.11 for instance.⁶¹

In any case, by stating in this letter that he will confront the issue in a Socratic manner and state his position like 'those men',

⁵⁶ See further Clarke (1951: 161–3), Glucker (1978: 34–5), and Brittain (2006: xi–xii).

⁵⁷ However, at *Tusculans* 2.9 he associates this method of discovering *veri simile* – which can be equated with the πιθανόν and what is *probabile*; see further Glucker (1995) – with the Peripatetics and the Academy in general (cf *De or.* 3.107), naming in particular Aristotle and Philo. Somewhat confusingly, at times Cicero himself gives priority for this style of reasoning to Aristotle (*De or.* 3.80, *Orat.* 46, *Fin.* 5.10, *Tusc.* 2.9), at other times to Plato (*Acad.* 1.46), and also, as in this letter, to Socrates (*DND* 1.11, *Tusc.* 5.11).

⁵⁸ Griffin (1995: 334–5). ⁵⁹ Glucker (1988), Steinmetz (1989).

⁶⁰ I am indebted to David Sedley for making me aware of this point.

⁶¹ Here Cicero alludes to the decline of Academic scepticism and presents himself as breathing new life into it. On the history of the Academy after the death of Philo, see further Glucker (1978) and Brittain (2001: 220–5).

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Cicero suggests strongly that he will consider his course of action in the manner and guise of a philosopher; in the same manner as Socrates had to decide on his public conduct at certain times, for instance with respect to the trial and condemnation of the generals involved in the Arginousai affair (Plat. *Ap.* 32b1–c3).⁶² However, despite the powerful philosophical atmosphere in this letter, the Socratic method is perhaps primarily a way of framing the question: the letter itself does not offer any firm evidence for philosophical doctrines being under consideration with respect to Cicero's political conduct. Following this passage Cicero looks at the beneficial pragmatic outcomes on the side of supporting Caesar (2.3.4). Then, on the side of resistance, he cites a passage from the third book of his own epic poem *De consulatu suo*, as well as a comment made by Hector in the twelfth book of Homer's *Iliad* (12.243): *quin semper nobis videatur* 'εἰς οἰωνὸς ἄριστος ἀμύνεσθαι περὶ πατρὸς' ('indeed, it always seems to me "that one augury is best: to fight for fatherland"', 2.3.4).⁶³ Here Cicero makes an interesting ethical point concerning the primacy of *pietas* and civic responsibility when determining conduct, but this does not appear to be the distinctive or exclusive domain of philosophy.

In general, therefore, although Cicero employs philosophy in these early letters to reflect on his past decisions, his current predicament, and his future course of action, it is not clear that he conceives of philosophy as a means to engage in politics. Consider two final examples. In 2.17 he writes: *neque tam me εὐελπίστια consolatur, ut antea, quam ἀδιαφορία, qua nulla in re tam utor quam in hac civili et publica* ('Nor am I consoled so much by optimism, as before, as by indifference, which I employ not in that matter so much as in these public and political matters', 2.17.2). This passage is from April 59 BC, when Cicero was

⁶² For Cicero's use of Socrates as an exemplar for political conduct, see also pages 90–2 and 188–90 below.

⁶³ Cf Cic. *Rep.* 6.13, 6.16. The ethical point in Hector's exchange with Polydamas at this point of the twelfth book of the *Iliad* is that civic responsibility, duty to one's fatherland, outweighs other considerations when determining one's conduct, for example considerations of the human cost in battle (12.215–30) and the duty one has to one's family (6.405–500).

already in rural retirement, and the reference to – perhaps Stoic – indifference may simply convey a certain detachment.⁶⁴ Despite Pompey's surprise marriage to Caesar's daughter Julia and its very serious political implications, highlighted in this letter (2.17.1–3), Cicero is saying that he has shut his mind off from such concerns and is not motivated to engage in any dynamic political action. A few months later in 2.19 (= 39 SB) he writes:

dices fortasse 'dignitatis ἄλις tamquam δρυός! salutē, si me amas, consule'. me miserum! cur non ades? nihil te profecto praeteriret. ego fortasse τυφλώττω et nimium τῷ καλῷ προσπέπονθα. (Cicero, *Epistulae ad Atticum* 2.19.1)

Perhaps you will say: 'enough of honour as in enough of acorns! Think of security, if you love me'. O wretched me! Why are you not here? Certainly nothing would escape you. I perhaps am blind and hold fast too much to the good.

In this letter Cicero confesses to be at a loss about how he should now act given the ongoing political crisis. In this passage he suggests that philosophy might be employed to help him make a decision. However, philosophy of the sort Cicero prefers, that which has the good or καλόν as its end (the Platonic, Old Academic, Peripatetic, or Stoic),⁶⁵ is apparently not a great guide in politics: being too blind to other considerations, too rigid in following the καλόν, might be a bad thing.⁶⁶ On the other hand, expediency or security, pragmatic concerns that are also central in Epicurean ethics (e.g., Epic. *KD* 6–7, 14, 31–40) and that were apparently stressed routinely by Atticus, might offer a better guide. Indeed, Cicero's negative attitude towards the application of philosophy in practical politics is most striking in an earlier letter from 60 BC. In 2.1.8 (= 21 SB) Cicero is scathing as he describes Cato speaking in the senate as if he were in Plato's

⁶⁴ On the role of 'indifferents' in Stoic ethics, see Annas (1993: 159–71).

⁶⁵ On Cicero's use of καλόν to refer to the idea of the moral good, see [chapter 2](#), n. 61 below. This passage is an early example of Cicero's routine practice of contrasting καλόν or *honestum* with what is expedient (*utile*).

⁶⁶ This might be a specific allusion to the blindness suffered by the philosopher who has seen the Forms when he returns to the shadowy world of the cave (Plat. *Rep.* 517d4–e2). Cicero identifies himself as a philosopher-king in a letter to his brother Quintus from the start of 59 (1.1.29 = 1 SB).

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πολιτεία rather than *in Romuli faece* ('in the shit of Romulus'), and as a political liability owing to his insistence on introducing and following philosophical principles in political matters when pragmatic expediency is a better guide.

In sum, these early letters to Atticus give the clear impression that Cicero considers philosophy to be a pursuit separate or dissociated from the practical business of politics. Philosophy has its place firmly in *otium*, its fulsome pursuit involves the rejection of political life, it is a refuge from politics, and it is a pursuit for old age. Philosophical thinking on ethical and political matters is more a reflective than a dynamic exercise; Cicero displays little interest in the positive practical application of philosophy in 'real-life' politics.⁶⁷ The relationship between philosophy and politics appears to be an uneasy one.

1.3 Reconciling philosophy and politics

It is clear from *Epistulae ad familiares* 1.9 (= 20 SB) that this view of the relationship between philosophy and politics has changed considerably by December 54 BC. As we saw in the first section, in that letter philosophy is not presented as having its place firmly in *otium* nor as a refuge from politics; rather, philosophy is presented as having a natural place in the political sphere and as offering useful and effective resources for dealing with various dilemmas and concerns in the field of practical politics.

Undoubtedly Cicero's own intellectual pursuits and political marginalisation are motivating factors behind the development

⁶⁷ To be sure, a positive view of the relationship between politics and philosophy is suggested in Cicero's formal letter of advice to his brother Quintus, dated from the start of 59 during Quintus' term as proconsul of Asia. But it is positive in a very specific respect. At 1.1.28–9 Greek philosophy is portrayed as a great gift of civilisation and a pursuit of which one should be both enamoured and proud; Plato is singled out for special praise for his doctrine that cities will only be happy if they are ruled by philosophers. Cicero even identifies himself and Quintus as philosopher-kings. The main point, however, is that a philosophical education, study of virtue and the liberal arts during one's youth, equips one well to be a leader later in life (cf *De or.* 3.54–90). The strict implementation of philosophical theory per se does not seem to be the point, nor does philosophy appear to be the means by which one engages in politics, but its effects on one's character and the subsequent benefits that arise from one's leadership are positive things none the less.

of this positive view of the relationship between philosophy and politics. On his return from exile in August 57 BC Cicero harboured ambitions for a glorious ascent to the pinnacle of power, only to find the first triumvirate still firmly in control of political proceedings.⁶⁸ He appears to have moved towards literary, intellectual, contemplative activities at this time, so far as he reasonably could.⁶⁹ His letters throughout the 50s contain many mentions of his various literary and philosophical activities,⁷⁰ and he was incredibly productive in these years.⁷¹ However, such activities were potentially suspect. In the 50s Cicero himself illustrates and appeals to such concerns in the preface to *De republica* (1.1–13) and his speech *In Pisonem* (esp. 22, 56–71). The force of these passages relies largely on established negative attitudes on the part of the Roman audience towards philosophical pursuits, which they associated with Greeks, the apolitical Epicurean life of pleasure, idle *otium*, debauchery, useless theorising, and so forth.⁷² Cicero took care to justify his own intellectual pursuits in such a way as to avoid adverse criticism of this kind. This is clear not only in the prefaces to the three philosophical dialogues of the 50s, but also in the letters.

In a letter to Lentulus Spinther from February 55 BC (*Fam.* 1.8 = 19 SB) Cicero stresses that the *otium* he wishes for and possesses is that which has arisen from political success on the *cursus honorum*. This, he says, would make his intellectual pursuits permissible, especially since he can no longer act

⁶⁸ On the glorious return to active political life, see especially the speeches *Post reditum in senatu* and *Post reditum ad populum*; note also *Att.* 4.1 = 73 SB. Soon, however, Cicero realised the unhappy reality. For detailed discussion of the speeches and Cicero's return from exile, see especially Nicholson (1992); also Gelzer (1969: 135–224), Stockton (1971: 176–226), and Rawson (1983: 122–45).

⁶⁹ Cicero was compelled to take an active role in public life because of his debts to the triumvirs and their expectation and pressure that he would play his part properly. It is clear from the letters that Cicero was very unhappy at being in such a position. Fantham (2004: 9–15) provides a good overview of Cicero's life in 56/55 BC.

⁷⁰ Cf e.g., *Att.* 4.4a.1 = 78 SB, 4.6.2–3 = 83 SB, 4.10.1 = 84 SB, 4.11.1–2 = 86 SB, 4.13.2 = 87 SB, 4.14.1 = 88 SB, 4.16.1–3 = 89 SB, *Q. fr.* 2.13.1 = 17 SB, 2.14.2 = 18 SB, 3.4.5 = 24 SB, 3.5.1–7 = 25 SB, *Fam.* 1.9.23 = 20 SB.

⁷¹ Nino (2004: 19–23) lists forty-eight known political, forensic, and literary (including philosophical) works that Cicero composed or was composing between 58 and 52 BC.

⁷² See, for example, DeLacy (1941), Blöbner (2001), Griffin (2001), and Gildenhard (2007: 8–63) with extensive further references.

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properly as an ex-consul in the political sphere.⁷³ In contrast, in two letters to Atticus from April 55 (4.6.1–2 = 83 SB, 4.10.1 = 84 SB) Cicero makes it clear that, although he desires to pursue *otium* fully devoted to intellectual studies and could choose to do so, such an existence would be undignified. Is Cicero contradicting himself here? No. Despite first appearances, Cicero is in fact commenting on two different modes of conduct. The reason why *this* mode of conduct would be undignified is that the *otium* is not of the right sort. When Cicero writes *quid si cessare libeat et in otium confugere? nequiquam; immo etiam in bellum et in castra* ('What if it were to please me to rest and to take refuge in the haven of *otium*? In vain; on the contrary I must in fact head to war and the camp', 4.6.2), he is referring to the fact that he cannot just give up and walk away from his obligations and duties. Although that would provide him with the life he desires, the *otium* resulting from that escapist action would be reprehensible. The nature of the *otium* is of fundamental importance: for Cicero, the life of intellectual pursuits is legitimate only in so far as it takes place in the right sort of *otium*, that is, *otium cum dignitate*, which is acceptable since it has arisen from the normal course of active political or public life and does not involve its neglect.

We can see in these letters that Cicero was assessing the problems surrounding the legitimacy of *otium* in 55 BC, around the same time as *De oratore* was being composed. But we do not yet have in the letters the idea, canvassed in *Epistulae ad familiares* 1.9, of philosophy itself offering a suitable and effective set of resources for articulating and dealing with problems in Roman political life. Indeed, the idea of philosophy as an escape and refuge from politics remains a clear motif in *Epistulae ad Atticum* 4.6, and it is evident still in October 54, only a few months before *Epistulae ad familiares* 1.9:

quaqueque vita maxime est ad naturam, ad eam me refero, ad litteras et studia nostra . . . fratrem mecum et te si habebō, per me isti pedibus trahantur; vobis ἐμφιλοσοφῆσαι possum. locus ille animi nostri stomachus ubi habitabat olim concaluit. privata modo et domestica nos delectent, miram securitatem videbis. (Cicero, *Epistulae ad Atticum* 4.18.2 = 92 SB)

⁷³ See Fox (2007: 32–3).

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But I turn myself back to that life which is most suited to my nature, to my books and studies . . . If I shall have my brother and you with me, as far as I care may they [Pompey, Caesar, and their cronies] be dragged by their feet. I am able to philosophise with you both. That place of my mind that used to hold my anger long ago became desensitised. If only my private and domestic affairs please me, you will find my equanimity remarkable.

Here Cicero professes his preference for the life (*vita*) of intellectual studies and mutual philosophising, at a time when he could write *nulla est res publica quae delectet, in qua acquiescam* ('there is no *res publica* any longer to delight me, in which I may rest content', 4.18.2). Cicero makes it clear to Atticus that he favoured this life because the political conditions were adverse, because he could not act freely or effectively in the political realm (4.18.1–3).⁷⁴ It is clearly presented as a life of refuge, strongly dissociated from politics.

There is, therefore, a strong contrast with *Epistulae ad familiares* 1.9 and its allusions to the Platonic letters; and in the years following this letter the positive relationship between philosophy and politics is stressed consistently in the correspondence: Cicero's philosophical pursuits are presented assertively as a contribution to political life rather than a refuge from it. This change of approach is made most obvious in a letter to Cato from late 51/early 50 BC,⁷⁵ written while in Cilicia and after the publication of the *De republica*:

solī prope modum nos philosophiam veram illam et antiquam, quae quibusdam otī esse ac desidiaē videtur, in forum atque in rem publicam atque in ipsam aciem paene deduximus. (Cicero, *Epistulae ad familiares* 15.4.16 = 110 SB)

We almost alone have brought that venerable and truthful philosophy, which appears to some to be a thing of leisure and idleness, into the Forum and into political affairs and almost into the very battle-line.⁷⁶

⁷⁴ On Cicero's use of *stomachus* to convey anger and indignation over politics, see Hoffer (2007).

⁷⁵ On Cicero's attitudes towards Cato's philosophical activities, compare also chapter 4, sections 4.3 and 4.4.

⁷⁶ This comment clearly recalls *De legibus* 3.14, where Cicero praises the Peripatetics and Academics for making their political theory applicable to practice. Note in particular: *Phalereus ille Demetrius . . . mirabiliter doctrinam ex umbraculis eruditorum otioque non modo in solem atque in pulverem, sed in ipsum discrimen aciemque produxit.*

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Given Cicero's public disparagement of Cato's philosophical pursuits in his speech *Pro Murena* (60–6), delivered in 63 BC, this comment is particularly striking. There Cato is criticised for importing inflexible and ludicrous Stoic positions into politics. Cicero had also criticised Cato in similar terms in a letter to Atticus from 60 BC (2.1.8 = 21 SB). Of course, this particular passage (*Fam.* 15.4.16) is motivated largely by the purpose of the letter as a whole: Cicero wishes to convince Cato, via the rhetorical tools of panegyric and flattery, to vote him a triumph.⁷⁷ But this does not detract from some interesting implications the passage raises regarding Roman attitudes towards philosophy. It clearly alludes to the common Roman view that philosophy is suspect, and that there are two key assumptions behind this: (1) philosophical pursuits reside firmly in *otium* and are dissociated from political life; (2) philosophical theory has no significant practical application. But the letter also argues that philosophy – provided it can be squared with such concerns – is a pursuit of which a Roman can be proud.⁷⁸

We can unpack two key elements of Cicero's argument from this letter to Cato. First, he claims that the critics are mistaken, because theory, in particular that of the venerable and truthful philosophy (that is, the Socratic, Platonic, Aristotelian, Peripatetic, Academic, and Stoic), has direct application to practice and understanding in a number of dimensions – 'in the public affairs of the Forum, in the political affairs of state, and even in the battle-line'. Philosophy is thus not pursued solely for its own sake; it can serve the greater civic good of Rome. Second, Cicero stresses that philosophy is not a pursuit limited to *otium* or idle periods; it also has a place in the actual execution of practical affairs – public duties, high politics, and military service. Indeed, in this passage Cicero refers to the contribution both he and Cato have made in this regard; they epitomise what philosophers and philosophy can

⁷⁷ The whole letter is a highly stylised formal plea. On Cicero's ambition for a triumph, see *Att.* 6.8.4 = 122 SB, 6.9.4 = 123 SB, 7.2.5–6 = 125 SB, 7.3.2–3 = 126 SB, 7.4.2 = 127 SB, 7.5.5 = 128 SB, 7.7.3–4 = 130 SB, 7.8.5 = 131 SB, 8.3.6 = 153 SB, 9.2a.1 = 169 SB, *Fam.* 15.5 = 111 SB, 15.6 = 112 SB. For further discussion see Wistrand (1979: 3–60) and Boes (1990: 194–8). Cato suggested a *supplicatio* was more appropriate.

⁷⁸ See Griffin (1989: 35).

and ought to give to politics and civic life. This positive picture of the relationship between philosophy and politics resonates with the picture in the Platonic letters, and it reaffirms in strong terms what we see in the philosophical works of the 50s and 40s.

1.4 Conclusion

In the correspondence we see Cicero's preoccupation with the place and role of philosophy in Roman political culture some years before he addresses such matters in his philosophical dialogues and treatises. Through the letters we can trace important changes in Cicero's thought: there is a transition from rather pessimistic attitudes about the relationship of philosophy and politics in the period before his exile to a more expansive conception of the positive role of philosophy in political life after it, which is most clearly asserted in an open apologetic letter from December 54 BC.

This shift in Cicero's attitudes is clear, and there are a number of possibilities for why it occurred, not least the dramatic upheavals in Cicero's own personal circumstances during the first half of the 50s; but it is difficult for us to identify precisely the causal factors or to say with certainty what was motivating Cicero. This shift does, however, coincide with an emphasis on Plato and the nature of his political actions, recounted in the Platonic letters. The scholarly consensus holds that Plato was very important in Cicero's public presentation of his own philosophy in the 50s, the most obvious evidence being his naming his own *De republica* and *De legibus* after Plato's *Republic* and *Laws*.⁷⁹ It is fair to say that Cicero was presenting himself as the Roman Plato. The importance of Cicero's correspondence and the Platonic letters has not been evaluated seriously in this context. And yet in *Epistulae ad familiares* 1.9 clearly Cicero presents the Plato of the letters as an authoritative model for his own political conduct.

⁷⁹ See, for example, Burkert (1965), Boyancé (1970b), Long (1995a: 43–52), and Gotter (1996) with further bibliography. For discussion of the extent of Cicero's knowledge of the Platonic corpus, see in particular DeGraff (1940) and Burkert (1965).

1.4 Conclusion

We cannot be sure whether Cicero in December 54 had suddenly come across the Platonic letters for the first time and found in them a positive model for his own political and philosophical activity, a model he was looking for in order to sanction his own intellectual enterprise and (new) vision of philosophy in Roman society, or whether he was already well acquainted with the Platonic letters and was drawing on them given the particular circumstances. It is surely significant that both the fifth and seventh Platonic letters are in the form of *apologiae* for Plato's political conduct and so might have come to mind as appropriate literary models for Cicero's own apologetic letter. In any case, it seems reasonable to think that the Platonic letters suggested to Cicero a form of philosophy that was politically acceptable, a form of philosophy that was not limited to *otium* or the composition and reading of literary dialogues and treatises but that had a natural place at the heart of practical politics.

In the next chapter we shall see another example of Cicero employing the resources of the Platonic letters as he continues to explore and develop in his correspondence the place and role of philosophy in Roman political life.

CHAPTER 2

CICERO AND PLATO'S *SEVENTH EPISTLE*

On the eve of civil war in 50 BC Cicero wrote to Atticus while returning from his governorship of Cilicia, informing him that he had decided to return to Italy to foster *concordia* or a victory for the good men (7.1 = 124 SB, 7.3 = 126 SB).¹ From these letters we can see that Cicero was entertaining two broad courses of action: (1) support Pompey and the republicans wholeheartedly and engage in opposition to Caesar whatever the consequences; or (2) act independently of personal ties, pragmatic concerns, and political/philosophical convictions so as to foster *concordia* between the two warring parties. By following (2) Cicero would be the subject of criticism from those who had chosen (1): he would be accused of betraying his republican principles and he would be open to the charges of desertion, cowardice, and cronyism towards Caesar. But Cicero did choose (2).

In this chapter I demonstrate how Cicero carefully constructs in his letters to Atticus from early 49 BC an elaborate philosophical narrative concerning his actions in the civil war, which serves as an apology for his choice and pursuit of (2). Cicero constructs for himself a persona on the model of 'Plato the philosophic advisor' that appears in the *Seventh Letter*; we are invited to consider Cicero as the new Plato, Caesar as the new Dionysius, and to judge them in the same manner as we do their illustrious predecessors. Cicero already had composed two treatises of political philosophy, *De republica* and *De legibus*, modelled on Plato's *Republic* and *Laws*. The letters show that he also constructed for a philosophically informed audience an epistolary account of his own political actions, again modelled on a Platonic original.²

¹ I discuss these two letters in detail in [chapter 3, sections 3.4 and 3.5](#) below.

² To be sure, an apologetic Platonic story might not have had much resonance with a large part of Roman aristocratic society, and it might even have been treated with derision by

This apologetic narrative is the counterpart to Plato's *Seventh Letter* in Cicero's political-philosophical oeuvre.³

This chapter continues to explore some of the themes discussed in the first chapter, in particular Cicero's use of the Platonic letters as epistolary models (again we examine an epistolary *apologia*), his presentation of Plato as an authoritative model for his own political conduct, and his increasing concern to create or define a positive and dynamic role for philosophy in Roman political life. In this chapter, moreover, we shall see Cicero expand on the opportunities presented by these philosophical resources: Cicero appropriates a diverse range of arguments and conceptual resources from the Platonic milieu in the *Seventh Letter*, concerning, for example, the nature of tyranny, how philosophers should relate to those in power, free and frank speech, the limits of philosophy's political effectiveness, and personal failure.

My exposition relies on a close reading of the letters to Atticus in the light of two allusions to Plato's *Seventh Letter* in letters from March 49 BC (9.10.2 = 177 SB, 9.13.4 = 180 SB). My argument contains a number of interwoven strands and is rather long and

some. None the less, on the basis of *Fam.* 1.9 = 20 SB, it seems that there was a 'philosophically informed' Roman audience who were positively inclined towards such explanations or narratives; see [chapter 1, section 1.1](#) above. It also might be objected straightaway that the apologetic story is limited to an audience of one, Atticus, and so Cicero's Platonic self-fashioning is little more than a private game with an intimate friend. I make the case in [sections 2.3.1](#) and [2.3.2](#) below that Cicero was writing to Atticus with a wider audience also in mind.

³ It must be stressed that I do not consider whether Cicero's account of his own actions is an accurate historical representation. This same question applies to Plato's account of his actions in the *Seventh Letter*; see further Boas (1948) and Levy (1956). It is a fair question but a separate issue. Many modern historians argue that in early 49 BC Cicero was in reality dithering and indecisive: largely because of his own desires for a triumph, he did not commit firmly to Pompey, and, once he had abandoned Rome, Cicero was probably aligning himself tentatively with Caesar with a view to a possible peace settlement; see, for example, Gelzer (1969: 243–53), Stockton (1971: 254–60), Wistrand (1979: 61–161), Rawson (1983: 186–95), and Lintott (2008: 281–9). Unsurprisingly, Cicero's apologetic narrative does not correspond with the judgement of these modern critics. Mitchell (1991: 232–61) offers a more sympathetic account of Cicero's actions at this period, concluding (260–1) that 'he was very much a displaced figure who retained a strong yearning to maintain his record of honourable service to the republic, but saw no acceptable means of doing so'. In this chapter we shall see that in his adoption of the Platonic persona of the philosophic advisor Cicero did see an acceptable way in which to act honourably for the good of the *res publica*.

complicated; an overview of the structure of my case will prove most useful before we begin.

I first draw our attention to the two Platonic allusions (section 2.1). I then establish the highly charged context in which they occur, stressing in particular Caesar's efforts to define Cicero as a genuine ally in the civil war (section 2.2). I argue that Cicero made these allusions in direct response to Caesar's actions (section 2.3). Here I undertake a close reading of *Epistulae ad Atticum* 9.10 and argue that it is a carefully composed personal *consolatio* that also forms a detailed *apologia* for Cicero's actions in the civil war up until this point, for which Plato's *Seventh Letter* and numerous earlier letters to Atticus are relevant. I then use the Platonic allusion in 9.10 as a prompt for a wider-ranging intertextual reading. First, I consider the importance of the alluded-to passage in the *Seventh Letter* itself (section 2.4). With a detailed picture of the relevant aspects of the *Seventh Letter* in hand, I then turn to expound and evaluate Cicero's own apologetic narrative in the letters from the earlier period of the civil war (section 2.5). Finally, I demonstrate how Cicero maintains the apologetic narrative after 9.10, and brings it to a crescendo via the second Platonic allusion in 9.13 and clever use of various literary and rhetorical devices, in particular code-switching between Greek and Latin (section 2.6).

2.1 Two Platonic allusions

The first allusion to Plato's *Seventh Letter* occurs in 9.10, dated 18 March 49 BC, a letter in which Cicero is concerned to justify his decisions and actions in the period between Pompey's abandonment of Rome (17 January 49) and his flight from Italy (17 March 49). The allusion occurs a brief way into the letter, after Cicero has written of his current mental distress (*aegritudo*) over whether his original decision not to follow Pompey in flight from Rome was right (9.10.1–2).⁴ After explaining why he had no compelling

⁴ I discuss this letter in detail in section 2.3.1 below.

2.1 Two Platonic allusions

reasons in January to follow Pompey, Cicero describes his current predicament as follows:

nunc emergit amor, nunc desiderium ferre non possum, nunc mihi nihil libri, nihil litterae, nihil doctrina prodest. ita dies et noctes tamquam avis illa mare prospecto, evolare cupio. do, do poenas temeritatis meae. etsi quae fuit illa temeritas? quid feci non consideratissime? (Cicero, *Epistulae ad Atticum* 9.10.2)

Now my desire becomes evident, now I am not able to bear the sense of loss, now books, letters, philosophy are of no help to me. Thus all night and day I gaze over the sea like that bird; I long to fly away. I am paying, how I am paying, the penalty for my thoughtlessness. And yet, what thoughtlessness? Was what I did not most carefully considered?

The image of the bird gazing out, longing to fly away, is an allusion to the following passage that details the nature of Plato's relationship with Dionysius during his second stay with him in 361–360 BC:

μέχρι μὲν δὴ τούτων ταύτη μοι βεβροθημένον ἐγεγόνει φιλοσοφία καὶ φίλοις· τὸ δὲ μετὰ ταῦτα ἐζῶμεν ἐγὼ καὶ Διονύσιος, ἐγὼ μὲν βλέπων ἔξω, καθάπερ ὄρνις ποθῶν ποθὲν ἀναπτέσθαι, ὁ δὲ διαμηχανώμενος τίνα τρόπον ἀνασοβήσοι με μηδὲν ἀποδούς τῶν Δίωνος. ὅμως δὲ ἐφάνημεν ἑταῖροί γε εἶναι πρὸς πᾶσαν Σικελίαν. (Plato, *Epistles* 7.347e6–348a4)

Up until this time it was the case that I had been helping philosophy and my friends in this way; but after this time Dionysius and I lived thus: I gazing outside, like a bird longing to spread my wings in flight from there, he scheming how he might clip my wings, paying none of Dion's money. But in this way to the whole of Sicily we appeared to be comrades.

This allusion is very oblique, but it is carefully made. We can see three separate correspondences: (1) *nihil doctrina prodest* with βεβροθημένον ἐγεγόνει φιλοσοφία;⁵ (2) *mare prospecto* with βλέπων ἔξω; (3) *evolare cupio* with ποθῶν ποθὲν ἀναπτέσθαι. The phrase *avis illa* is the key: the emphatic reference to 'that bird'

⁵ To be sure, Plato writes that he has helped philosophy, not that philosophy has been of help to him. None the less, Cicero's comment *nihil doctrina prodest* still accords smoothly with the passage from the *Seventh Letter*. I establish in [section 2.4](#) below that Plato helped philosophy by actively using philosophy in his dealings with Dionysius. After a certain period, philosophy was of no help to Plato in his dealings with Dionysius (this is what Cicero picks up on in his comment); for this reason Plato was not of help to philosophy, the point that is expressed explicitly in the passage from the *Seventh Letter*.

specifically brings the passage from Plato's *Seventh Letter* to mind and activates these correspondences.⁶ It is beyond doubt that Cicero makes a careful allusion here.

The second allusion is more obvious. It occurs in 9.13, dated 23 March, a letter in which Cicero is concerned to explain or defend the nature of his current and future actions, in particular how he will act in the wake of a request from Caesar (9.6A = 172A SB) given his unopposed power in Italy (9.13.3–4). Cicero quotes a comment Plato made in the context of his first stay with Dionysius in 367 BC (*Ep.* 7.329d7–e1):

qua re ita paratus est ut, etiam si vincere non possit, quo modo tamen vinci ipse possit non videam. ego autem non tam γοητείαν huius timeo quam πειθανάγκην. 'αἱ γὰρ τῶν τυράννων δεήσεις' inquit Πλάτων 'οἷσθ' ὅτι μεμιγμένα ἀνάγκαις'.⁷ (*Cicero, Epistulae ad Atticum* 9.13.4)

Thus, he [Caesar] is equipped in such a manner that, even if he cannot win, I nevertheless do not see any way he can be beaten. I fear not so much his guile as his compulsion masquerading as persuasion. 'For', said Plato, 'the requests of tyrants are mixed with compulsion you know'.

Although these allusions have been duly noted by commentators, very little serious consideration has been given to what importance they possess in the context of the *Epistulae ad Atticum*.⁸ This scholarly neglect is surprising and unjustifiable: the allusions both develop and also provide us with the means to understand an elaborate philosophical narrative concerning Cicero's actions in the civil war.

⁶ See Hutchinson (1998: 166).

⁷ The text of the letter reads: τὰς δὲ τῶν τυράννων δεήσεις ἴσμεν, ὅτι μεμιγμένα ἀνάγκαις εἰσιν. The quotation, although not word-perfect, is certainly close enough to what we have in the *Seventh Letter*. It does not seem as if the other two Greek words are allusions to Plato. Although γοητεία appears in the Platonic corpus in the context of persuasion and the bewitching power of words (e.g., *Rep.* 413d7, 602d2), πειθανάγκη and its cognates do not appear at all.

⁸ The allusions are noted without further critical comment by, for example, Boot (1886: 406, 415), who notes that Victorius had already noted them in the sixteenth century, Tyrrell and Purser (1879–1933: 4.156, 4.170), and Shackleton Bailey (1965–70: 4.378, 4.385). Gildenhard (2006: 203–5) discusses briefly the importance of the allusions in the context of the *Epistulae ad Atticum*. Long (1995a: 43) notes without further elaboration: 'Cicero refers to Plato's 7th letter, in order to compare his own situation in regard to Caesar with that of Plato confronting Dionysius of Syracuse'. See also Burkert (1965: 177–8) and Boyancé (1970b: 228).

2.2 Caesar's letter and Cicero's public image

2.2 Caesar's letter and Cicero's public image

It is important at this point to stress that the two allusions occur in letters written after Cicero had received a special letter from Caesar, as well as news of Pompey and the republican forces' flight from Italy (9.6 = 172 SB, 9.6A = 172A SB).⁹ Here is Caesar's letter:

Scr. in itinere Arpis Brundisium c. III Non. Mart. an. 49
CAESAR IMP. S. D. CICERONI IMP.

cum Furnium nostrum tantum vidissem neque loqui neque audire meo commodo potuissem, <cum> properarem atque essem in itinere praemissis iam legionibus, praeterire tamen non potui quin et scriberem ad te et illum mitterem gratiasque agerem, etsi hoc et feci saepe et saepius mihi facturus videor; ita de me mereris. in primis a te peto, quoniam confido me celeriter ad urbem venturum, ut te ibi videam, ut tuo consilio, gratia, dignitate, ope omnium rerum uti possim. ad propositum revertar: festinationi meae brevitateque litterarum ignosces. reliqua ex Furnio cognosces. (Cicero, *Epistulae ad Atticum* 9.6A)

Written in transit between Arpi and Brundisium, c. 5 March 49
Caesar Imperator to Cicero Imperator

Although I have just now seen our friend Furnius, I would have been able neither to speak nor listen to him at my convenience, since I was making haste and was in transit with my legions already sent before me; I have not been able, however, to overlook writing to you, sending him, and expressing thanks, though I have done this often and expect to do so more often; yes, you have earned it from me. Foremost, I ask of you, since I am confident that I will quickly be travelling to the city, that I might see you there, so that I can avail myself of your advice, your influence, your dignity, and your help in all matters. I shall return to the point: may you forgive the haste and shortness of my letter. You will gather the rest from Furnius.

We have Caesar's letter because Cicero himself appended it deliberately to his own letter to Atticus (9.6.6) and it has been included in the collection *ad Atticum*.¹⁰ However, before we consider Cicero's presentation and interpretation of this letter, and our own reading of it in the context of the correspondence to Atticus,¹¹ it is worth considering it outside of the Ciceronian

⁹ Cicero first heard news on 11 March, the date of the composition of 9.6, that Pompey had sailed from Brundisium; this was erroneous news – Pompey did not sail until 17 March.

¹⁰ And so the meaning of Caesar's letter is influenced by its placement in the collection; see Sharrock (2000).

¹¹ See section 2.6 below.

context. We can then see how Cicero with his use of the Platonic allusions moves to counter the impression generated by Caesar. Let us, therefore, make a first reading of this letter, which I shall call a pro-Caesarian or charitable reading.

Read charitably, it is apparent that in this letter Caesar has claimed Cicero as an important ally in the struggle against Pompey. Caesar conducts the exchange in terms of close *amicitia* and ingratiates himself with Cicero. Shackleton Bailey notes the friendly greeting, more informal and deferential than the abrupt and officious manner in which Pompey greets Cicero.¹² Hall considers Caesar's words to be examples of linguistic politeness and aristocratic civility.¹³ White stresses that the letter is full of social niceties and clichés, which serve to emphasise the closeness between the two men as well as the normality of the situation.¹⁴ Caesar makes it clear that Cicero is very special to him: he gets more claim to his precious time than *Furnius noster*. Indeed, the mere fact that he has made a point of spending time writing to Cicero, despite the urgency of his position, impresses on Cicero that Caesar values him as a very important figure, worthy of respect.

Strikingly, Caesar makes a point of thanking Cicero (*gratiasque agerem*). I suggest that Caesar is thanking Cicero for his support in the struggle against Pompey, support that has been indicated by Cicero's failure to join with Pompey's forces and his decision to stay in Italy.¹⁵ The phrase *ita de me mereris* is a particularly astute manoeuvre – Cicero has *earned* the praise Caesar is giving him. This implies that Cicero has consciously made a moral choice to side with Caesar. Moreover, the phrase is ambiguous: *de me*

¹² Shackleton Bailey (1965–70: 4.366). Pompey's letters are almost contemptuous of Cicero (e.g., 8.11A = 161A SB, 8.11C = 161C SB). Cicero himself complains about the flippancy with which Pompey treats him (*epistularum Pompei duarum quas ad me misit negligentiam*, 8.11.6 = 161 SB). Caesar knew how to rub Cicero up the right way. See also Boissier (1897: 225–7), Gildenhard (2007: 93 n. 17), and Hall (2009: 120–4).

¹³ Hall (2009: 43–4). ¹⁴ White (2003: 82–5).

¹⁵ Scholars tend to argue that Caesar thanks Cicero for his dealings with the consul Lentulus Crus; see White (2003: 82 n. 42). But Caesar had been letting Cicero know for weeks that he was happy with him because of his ongoing failure to commit fully to Pompey (7.2.7 = 125 SB, 7.3.11 = 126 SB, 7.17.3–4 = 141 SB, 7.21.3 = 145 SB, 8.11.5 = 161 SB). In this letter he is fostering the impression that this failure actually equates with support for himself.

2.2 Caesar's letter and Cicero's public image

mereris can easily mean 'you have served me well' in a political or military sense. On the one hand, this phrase implies Cicero's conscious support against Pompey, but, on the other, it is full of irony – if Cicero were not really a supporter of Caesar, he would be serving him well anyway. Moreover, the military connotation impresses on Cicero that he is a subordinate to Caesar, the commanding general. This is tempered, however, by the carefully structured greeting in which Caesar hails Cicero as *imperator* and uses that sole honorific in his own case – he stresses that they are equals. Thus, this letter is not presented as a matter of *clementia* to a potential enemy, nor as a demand from a subject, but rather as a genuine gesture to an ally, a friend; it is presented as a thanksgiving for Cicero's true and ongoing support. None the less, there is an assertive, forceful, and ironic undercurrent.

Having laid claim to Cicero's loyalty, Caesar then appeals to elements of Cicero's character and political expertise he knows he will enjoy – his *consilium*, his *gratia*, his *dignitas*, all noble elements of a true Roman statesman. Caesar wants to employ these elements in his own struggle, but by subjugating himself before them in this letter he appeals to Cicero's conception of himself as a wise and respected leader, as an ex-consul worthy and deserving of a central role in politics.¹⁶ He acknowledges Cicero's *auctoritas* and encourages him to come fully on board for the good of the *res publica*.¹⁷ It is implied that, by meeting with Caesar, Cicero will be doing the right thing.

There are no threats or demands, but it is implied that Cicero himself will benefit if he grants Caesar's request. There is an assertive undercurrent, but this is based on military authority and carefully tempered by the formal address implying equality. The letter is clearly cordial and it emphasises the equality and *amicitia* between the two men, in particular the lack of a dominating or

¹⁶ Caesar's actions here parallel Dionysius surrounding himself (via coercion) with prestigious men such as Plato so as to bolster the legitimacy and esteem of his regime (Plat. *Ep.* 7.329d1–330b7); see Gildenhard (2006: 204–5).

¹⁷ Note that Cicero himself had stressed the fundamental importance of *consilium* for the proper and successful functioning of the *res publica* in his *De republica* (1.41–3); see Schofield (1995: 77–81). By requesting Cicero's own personal *consilium*, Caesar was also perhaps playing on this exposition.

controlling power in the relationship. Indeed, the letter appears relatively straightforward to interpret.¹⁸ Read charitably, it is not hard to infer from the letter that Caesar and Cicero were genuine friends and allies, and that the letter itself is a typical social exchange reinforcing this relationship.

The impression this letter generates when read charitably is in keeping with that which Caesar was fostering among the Roman elite. Caesar and his agents not only maintained an epistolary exchange with Cicero, but also publicised certain of Cicero's letters in such a way so as to create the public impression that Cicero was sympathetic to Caesar's cause.¹⁹ A few weeks before he received 9.6A, Cicero writes with regard to a letter *brevis sed benevolentiam significantis* ('short but indicating goodwill') that he had sent to Caesar: *eas si quo ille misit, in publico proponat velim* ('If he has sent it to third parties, I would be happy that he display it in public', 8.2.1 = 152 SB). Cicero not only acknowledges that Caesar may have passed his letter on to third parties, a common and accepted practice,²⁰ but also raises the possibility that he may post or display it in public, as he had previously a letter from Pompey (7.17.2 = 141 SB).²¹ Despite the bravado apparent in this comment, in the same letter Cicero displays a concern with how another letter to Caesar might be interpreted, not only by Caesar, but also by third parties (8.2.1–2).²² He is worried that he will be rebuked on the basis of what the letter

¹⁸ White (2003: 83–4): 'Caesar's words are not ambiguous or obscure. On the contrary they are clichés'.

¹⁹ See further White (2003: 89–90) and Gildenhard (2007: 93). The frequent letters from Balbus and Oppius (8.15A = 165A SB, 9.7A = 174A SB, 9.7B = 174B SB, 9.13A = 181A SB), Caesar's agents, also add to this picture of Cicero's compliance in their plans; see further White (2003: 72–80). Indeed, the manipulation of 'private' correspondence appears to have been a common tactic on both sides of the struggle (8.9.2 = 188 SB). There is also a possibility that Caesar leaked some of his own letters, such as 9.6A, into public. Suetonius (*Div. Iul.* 56.6) says that a collection of Caesar's letters to Cicero was extant in his day; see Ebbeler (2003).

²⁰ See Nicholson (1994: 58–9).

²¹ In a later letter Cicero compares this practice with reading a letter *in contione*, in a public meeting (8.9.2 = 188 SB).

²² Cicero also alludes to the possibility that Caesar and his allies might fabricate letters purportedly from himself for nefarious purposes (8.2.2) – on the practice, see, for example, *Fam.* 3.11.5 = 74 SB, *Att.* 11.16.1 = 227 SB, 12.32.1 = 271 SB; also Nicholson (1994: 56).

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might be seen to imply about his relationship with Caesar and his allies. It is, we might say, a hermeneutical anxiety that has arisen because of the different impressions that are (or could be) generated depending on the context in which the letter is read, and an awareness of the effects these might have on his public image.²³

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Clearly Cicero did not wish to be portrayed as a close ally and supporter of Caesar: that would bring him dishonour in the eyes of the *optimates* with Pompey, the men he himself respected and from whom he craved approbation for his conduct at this time.²⁴ Thus, he writes to Atticus about Caesar's gratitude in 9.6A: *sed illum maiores mihi gratias agere quam vellem* ('But he thanks me more than I would wish', 9.6.6). He could not easily or safely dispel the impression Caesar was fostering by his actions. Instead he responded by creating a competing impression in his letters to Atticus. The Platonic allusions are of exceptional importance in this respect.

Now, one might immediately ask: how could a 'private' letter form an effective response if Cicero has his public image in mind? The editors obviously could have organised the collection with a wider audience in mind when preparing the letters for publication in later years, but did Cicero himself do so in 49 BC? Some scholars have previously seen that Cicero was developing some kind of response in his letters to Atticus to the impression that Caesar was fostering. They have, however, considered the letters, and hence the response, to be intended for Atticus alone.²⁵ But

²³ Note that Cicero also voices concern over Caesar's manipulative practice with regard to 9.11A (= 178A SB), a letter sent by Cicero to Caesar in reply to 9.6A that expresses a readiness to work with him for peace and reconciliation and that had become *pervulgata* (8.9.1 = 188 SB). It is worth noting that at the end of the letter Cicero suggests that the leaking of the letter into a public context (in all likelihood by Caesar) creates interpretative problems that might in fact be to his advantage. He writes: *sed tamen signa conturbantur quibus voluntas a simulatione distingui posset* (8.9.2). Given the nature of the leak and the uncertainty of the times, there would be doubts regarding his sincerity.

²⁴ Cf e.g., *Att.* 7.1.4 = 124 SB, 7.12.3 = 135 SB, 7.24.2 = 148 SB, 8.1.3–4 = 151 SB, 8.16.2 = 166 SB, 9.1.2–4 = 167 SB, 9.2a.3 = 169 SB.

²⁵ For example, Brunt (1986: 12) considers Cicero to be concerned that these letters to Atticus 'should be susceptible of public justification' while importantly remaining essentially private or intimate: 'none of the letters to Atticus is thus an *apologia* intended

there is some evidence that Cicero did have a wider target audience in mind as he responded to Caesar in his letters to Atticus.

2.3.1 *Epistulae ad Atticum 9.10*

Epistulae ad Atticum 9.10, in which the first Platonic allusion occurs, is the crucial piece of evidence for ascertaining the limits or target of Cicero's response to Caesar. It is written in a sophisticated style and located within an established epistolary philosophical tradition: it takes the form of a personal *consolatio* for the purpose of curing *aegritudo* over whether his decision not to follow Pompey was right. The temptation is to interpret the letter as being simply what it purports to be, namely a self-reflexive, self-justificatory, therapeutic exercise. However, the letter is not only an elaborately crafted personal *consolatio*; it also forms the basis for an *apologia* directed at a wider audience: the letter is Cicero's attempt to define and wrest back control of his public image with regard to the earlier period of the civil war.

In the first section of the letter we are presented with an image of Cicero unable to sleep owing to mental, emotional distress. In order to treat his distress, he is writing this letter to Atticus:

sed cum me aegritudo non solum somno privaret verum ne vigilare quidem sine summo dolore pateretur, tecum ut quasi loquerer, in quo uno acquiesco, hoc nescio quid nullo argumento proposito scribere institui. (Cicero, *Epistulae ad Atticum* 9.10.1)

But since my mental distress not only deprived me of sleep but also did not allow me even to be awake without the greatest pain, I have started to write this thing (which isn't much) with no subject in view, just so that I might talk to you, as it were, in which alone I find relief.

This passage is carefully composed as a prologue to a more formalised literary work: the vivid motifs of mental distress that we see here are formal elements of the philosophical genre of *consolatio*,²⁶

for others, of the kind best exemplified by his long letter to Lentulus Spinther (*Fam.* 1.9). Compare Gildenhard (2006: 203): 'Cicero tried his best to ennoble his wretched terms of existence in his correspondence with Atticus'.

²⁶ Of course, Cicero might well have been suffering such emotional pain; there is no way that we can be certain. At any rate, the genre of the *consolatio* requires the reader to accept on some level the truth of the emotion.

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which, in the words of Hutchinson, 'aims not at uncritical condolence, but at the control or removal, through argument, of passion at least prone to excess'.²⁷ There was a long tradition of consolatory works with which Cicero himself was familiar;²⁸ and after the death of his daughter Tullia Cicero composed his own *Consolatio* (*Att.* 12.14.3 = 251 SB, 12.20.2 = 258 SB), a lost work that he places in his philosophical oeuvre (*Div.* 2.3; cf *Tusc.* 1.65–6, 1.76, 3.76, 4.63).²⁹ The striking vocabulary of emotion in 9.10.1, *aegritudo* in particular, informs us that Cicero is operating within this framework. For Cicero, *aegritudo* specifically denotes intense emotion of the sort that requires philosophical therapy or *consolatio* (*Tusc.* 3.7, 3.70–9, 3.83–4); *aegritudo* is a disease that needs a cure (*Tusc.* 3.8–14).³⁰

We need not believe Cicero's deprecatory remarks in 9.10.1 that this letter is 'nothing much' (*hoc nescio quid*), written with no subject in view. As well as being rhetorical flourishes that suggest that this letter is in fact of great significance,³¹ their point is to stress the internal conversation that the letter represents. Although Cicero speaks of talking with Atticus, as it were (*quasi*), and in 9.10.4–9 quotes Atticus numerous times, throughout the therapeutic process Atticus is present only as a passive external observer. Rather, the letter is a *consolatio* of a special kind,

²⁷ Hutchinson (1998: 50). The therapeutic control of the emotions is a central concern for almost all ancient philosophical traditions; see especially Nussbaum (1994) with further bibliography.

²⁸ The most famous *consolatio* was by the Academic Crantor (*Tusc.* 1.115, 3.12, *Acad.* 2.135, DL 4.27), and in letters to Atticus from March 45 BC Cicero refers to numerous other works on consolation that he was reading while grieving after the death of his daughter Tullia (12.14.3 = 251 SB 12.18.1 = 254 SB). For detailed discussion of the genre of the *consolatio*, illustrated with numerous examples, see especially Kassel (1958).

²⁹ The elder Pliny (*NH praef.* 22) gives the impression that Crantor was the key source for Cicero's *Consolatio*; see further Hutchinson (1998: 49 n. 1). Baiter and Kayser (1860–9) provide the testimonia for the work. The *Tusculans* is deeply concerned with consolation; see White (1995: esp. 224–46). There are also extant consolatory letters both to and from Cicero himself (e.g., *Fam.* 4.5 = 248 SB, 5.14 = 251 SB, 5.16 = 187 SB, 5.18 = 51 SB, *Brut.* 1.9 = 18 SB); for discussion of these letters, in which there are frequently philosophical elements, see Kassel (1958: 98–103), Hutchinson (1998: 49–77), and Wilcox (2005) on *Fam.* 4.5.

³⁰ Cicero develops this motif in detail throughout book 3 of the *Tusculans*; see White (1995: 226–7). See also more generally Nussbaum (1994: 13–47).

³¹ See Hutchinson (1998: 163).

namely a *consolatio* to oneself – an innovation that Cicero attributes years later to his *Consolatio* (12.14.3), which also seems to have taken the form of a letter to himself.³² A *consolatio* was traditionally addressed to someone else and its aesthetic relied on an intercourse between reader (consoled) and author (consoler). But here the impression generated from the very beginning is that this letter is a therapeutic exercise for the benefit of Cicero himself.

None the less, by the very act of sharing the *consolatio* (by sending it in a letter to Atticus), Cicero invites the suspicion that it is not a strictly personal, private affair. We have some evidence that Atticus himself had similar suspicions concerning the real agenda of the letter. In 9.13.3 Cicero writes: συναγωγή *consiliorum tuorum non est a me collecta ad querelam sed magis ad consolationem meam* ('The digest of your advice was not gathered by me for the purpose of recrimination but rather for my own consolation'). It is apparent that Atticus' reaction to 9.10, particularly the lengthy quotations from his own letters, compelled Cicero to define it explicitly as a personal *consolatio*. It is clear that Atticus did not interpret 9.10 as a *consolatio* alone, but was unsure what the point of the letter really was. It seems that he took offence at a perceived tone of recrimination, which prompted Cicero's placatory explanation. Perhaps Atticus thought that Cicero was criticising or even blaming him for his current predicament, or perhaps he suspected that Cicero wrote the letter with an eye to leaking it into public, about which he was unhappy. In any case, the recipient of the letter evidently found it challenging to interpret because he thought it had a different meaning than just *consolatio*.

We can sharpen our suspicions by comparing another letter that also concerns the therapy of *aegritudo*. In 9.4 (= 173 SB; written after 9.6), after declaring at the start of the letter that he cannot write with a tranquil mind (*soluta animo*), Cicero then describes how he is writing declamations on θέσεις ('general questions') relevant to the current political situation *ne me totum aegritudini*

³² Shackleton Bailey (1965–70: 5.311) argues that the reference to the *Consolatio* at 12.14.3 (*ipse me per litteras consolaretur*) would most naturally refer to a letter.

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dedam ('lest I give myself wholly to emotional distress', 9.4.1; cf 9.9.1). He admits to escaping into literary pursuits as a means of mental consolation.³³ However, these exercises that Cicero purports to be undertaking, arguing *in utramque partem* and *tum Graece tum Latine* ('now in Greek, now in Latin', 9.4.3), are not included in any letter to Atticus. All we have is a lengthy catalogue of the sorts of question Cicero is considering, presented in Greek (9.4.2). There are no examples of Cicero's reasoning, nor the conclusions he has reached; these exercises remain genuinely private. So why did Cicero share the *consolatio* in 9.10 with Atticus and not any of these other formal exercises combating emotional distress? I propose that this particular literary exercise has been chosen specifically for sharing via a letter because, in contrast with the other private literary activities Cicero was undertaking at around the same time, it forms the basis of an *apologia* directed at a wider audience.

After the prologue Cicero states in the clearest terms the reason for his *aegritudo*: *amens mihi fuisse a principio videor et me una haec res torquet quod non omnibus in rebus labentem vel potius ruentem Pompeium tamquam unus manipularis secutus sim* ('I think that I have been mad from the beginning, and this one thing tortures me, that I did not follow Pompey like one of his company, slipping or rather rushing to disaster in all matters', 9.10.2). We can see here that Cicero's present mental distress concerns his actions in the past (*a principio, secutus sim*) that still have repercussions in the present. From the perspective of *consolatio*, Cicero is tortured because he believes or suspects that he made the wrong decision in the past. We can anticipate that the therapy will be the purging of this belief and the justification of the decision. From the perspective of *apologia*, however, Cicero is tortured because he thinks that *others* might think that he made the wrong decision in the past.³⁴ As such, Cicero is answering the charge and then offering a defence.

³³ I argue in section 2.5.3 below that, like the *consolatio* in 9.10, these literary pursuits are of a distinctly philosophical nature.

³⁴ We can speculate that Cicero is also worried that others (especially republicans with Pompey) might think that he deliberately chose to side with Caesar, which was of course the impression Caesar was fostering.

Cicero then begins to justify his past decisions. He first makes it clear that Pompey had no claims on his obedience in January: Pompey had acted in such a way that Cicero had no desire to follow him in flight, nor felt any compulsion to do so (9.10.2). Strikingly, however, Cicero soon interrupts his meditations on the past with an emphatic *nunc*: now, in the present, his true desire, *amor*, has become clear. In a rhetorical flourish (the anaphora of *nunc*) Cicero restates the strength of his emotional distress: although he had good reasons to act as he did in January, he none the less now, in March, feels at fault given the present situation. His true desire has become clear, namely to follow Pompey in flight. Then, in another rhetorical flourish, the allusion to Plato's bird, he conveys that he is now powerless to act on this desire and also stresses his sense of longing and loss (*desiderium*).³⁵ With the strength of his *aegritudo* restated, Cicero then returns to the task of analysing and justifying his decisions in the past that have left him in such a sorry situation (9.10.2–3).

Here, Cicero presents a carefully constructed image of himself for the benefit of others. He depicts himself as a true Roman statesman who places the well-being of the *res publica* above personal gain and who endeavours to save his fellow Romans from the evils of internecine strife. Cicero did not flee, because instead he was working for the good of Rome; he did not betray Pompey, nor did he ally himself with Caesar. In contrast, both Pompey and Caesar are identified with notorious figures such as Sulla (9.10.3), and as only too eager to put themselves above the well-being of the *res publica*. It is obvious that this sort of patriotic argument and image would appeal to a wider Roman audience, and as part of a *consolatio* would speak to (and reveal) that part of Cicero himself.

Cicero then says that Atticus' advice above all held him back from following Pompey (*sed ea quae scrips[ist]i me tardarunt et auctoritas maxime tua*, 9.10.3). At this point Cicero describes how he began to read his *volumen* of Atticus' letters (9.10.4), and in the following sections (9.10.4–9) he judges his previous decisions and

³⁵ I elaborate on the full apologetic significance of the Platonic allusion in [section 2.4](#) below.

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conduct against the advice of Atticus contained therein. This is by far the largest and most important part of the letter. The numerous direct quotations Cicero makes from Atticus' letters, fourteen in all, which comprise the vast majority of the text, are a striking feature. Why should Cicero quote Atticus' words back to him? Cicero is constructing a digest of an ongoing conversation with Atticus in order to set the record straight and show his own concern for proper, consistent conduct. By constructing such an account, he (and others) can judge more precisely whether he himself acted properly.

The nature of Atticus' advice is incredibly nuanced and, in many respects, weak. Nearly all the passages Cicero chooses to quote are conditional in nature: there are thirteen instances of *si* alone. It is clear from such cautious language that Atticus' advice was guarded and qualified. Indeed, it is clear that Atticus provides advice with a range of possible scenarios in mind: he makes it explicit that different courses of action would be warranted depending on the actions of other people, the outcomes of certain events, and so forth. Most of all, Atticus' advice is indicative of the difficulties of decision-making in conditions of uncertainty and danger. Without definite knowledge, no definite advice could be given. The default option in such circumstances was to wait and suspend judgement until further information came to hand, which explains the nature of Atticus' advice and the constant discussion and argument *in utramque partem* about what Cicero should do.³⁶

Having considered Atticus' advice, Cicero now concludes that he has done nothing wrong (9.10.10). The force of the argument seems to rest on some notion concerning moral culpability for decisions made in less than ideal conditions. In 9.10.4–9 the impression is generated that Cicero himself was consistent in his decision-making: he did nothing rash or unseemly, but acted at each moment in accordance with the knowledge he possessed and on the prudent advice of Atticus.

³⁶ Cf esp. 7.10 = 133 SB, 7.12.1–4 = 135 SB, 7.13–14 = 136–8 SB, 7.19–24 = 143–8 SB, 7.26.2–3 = 150 SB, 8.2.4 = 152 SB, 8.3 = 153 SB, 8.4.3 = 156 SB, 8.12 = 162 SB, 8.14.2–3 = 164 SB, 8.15.2–3 = 165 SB, 9.2 = 168 SB, 9.2a = 169 SB.

Certainly, with hindsight and his present knowledge of how events outside of his control transpired, he would have acted differently; but he did not possess such knowledge at the time of his past decisions, so he could not be expected to act upon it. Thus, the belief that he acted wrongly in the past has arisen only as a result of his (and others') current knowledge and his (and others') invalid retrospective application of it to his past decisions. So ends the *apologia*. Indeed, Cicero then also formally concludes the *consolatio*: he states that his reading of Atticus' advice has brought him relief:

his ego tuis scriptis me consolor, ut nihil a me adhuc delictum putem. tu modo auctoritatem tuam defendito; adversus me nihil opus est, sed consciis ego <e>o aliis. ego, si nihil peccavi, reliqua tuebor ... ego his litteris hoc tamen profeci; perlegi omnis tuas et in eo acquievi. (Cicero, *Epistulae ad Atticum* 9.10.10)

I console myself with these passages in your letters, so that I think that up till now I have done nothing wrong. You, just defend your own advice; there is no need towards me, but I want others to be in the know. I, if I have done nothing wrong, will not fail in what remains ... By this letter I have nevertheless done this: I have read through all yours and found relief in that.³⁷

The underlined phrase in the final passage suggests strongly that it is in fact nameless 'others' (whom I take to include those republicans who have gone with Pompey)³⁸ who are the target of the letter's message: Cicero wants³⁹ them to know 'the truth' about his actions in the past, which would serve as a response against the impression being generated by Caesar. It is also a stern invitation to Atticus to do the work in disseminating his side of the story to

³⁷ Ingo Gildenhard has suggested to me an interesting alternative interpretation of the passage: he reads it as a jocular finish to the letter, encouraging Atticus to canvass support among waverers in Italy so that Cicero is not the only republican to have deserted Pompey. He argues that there is a sophisticated joke revolving around the idiom of criminal responsibility (*delictum, defendito, sed consciis ego aliis, peccavi*). The joke runs as follows: 'keep airing your views (*defendito*) Atticus, even though you have convinced me that I have not committed a crime (*delictum*); I would like others to stay for I need "partners in crime" (*sed consciis ego aliis*)'. Both readings seem reasonable and there might at any rate be a deliberate ambiguity here: Cicero benefits (in different ways) on either reading.

³⁸ Even if having other 'republicans' with him in Italy would help his situation, Cicero (and these 'republicans') would still have to face up to those who have already gone – thus, I think that Cicero is concerned with justifying himself to these people.

³⁹ Note that *ego* has a particularly strong force: it has connotations of *need*.

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these nameless others.⁴⁰ The implication is that, by defending his own advice and putting these others 'in the know', Atticus will actually be defending Cicero – he will be delivering his apologetic message.⁴¹ We need not speculate further on how Atticus might have gone about this, or whether in fact Atticus ever made any effort to put Cicero's project into action. We can instead limit ourselves to exploring Cicero's practice in developing this apologetic story.

2.3.2 *Creating a story: rereading the Epistulae ad Atticum in the light of 9.10*

Cicero's *apologia* is not limited to 9.10. In this letter Cicero encourages the reader (Atticus and ourselves) to *reread* his earlier letters as a story or narrative with certain pressures specifically in mind.

Cicero develops the narrative by describing his own interpretative practice with regard to Atticus' letters. In 9.10.4 Cicero writes: *nam cum ad hunc locum venissem, evolvi volumen epistularum tuarum quod ego signo habeo servoque diligentissime* ('For when I came to this point, I unrolled the volume of your letters which I hold under seal and preserve most carefully');

⁴⁰ In support of this picture, in other letters of this time Cicero displays considerable concern regarding others' approval of his actions (e.g., *Att.* 7.1.4 = 124 SB, 7.12.3 = 135 SB, 7.24.2 = 148 SB, 8.1.3–4 = 151 SB, 8.16.2 = 166 SB, 9.1.2–4 = 167 SB, 9.2a.3 = 169 SB). He also describes Atticus' role in ascertaining their approbation and communicating it to him. In 9.10 itself Cicero writes: *scribis Peducaeo quoque nostro probari quod quierim* (9.10.10). In 9.7 he writes: *bonis viris quod ais probari quae adhuc fecerimus scirique ab iis <non sine causa nos> non profectos valde gaudeo* (9.7.6 = 174 SB); Shackleton Bailey (1965–70) 4.367 explains his earlier remark *sed plane τὸ συνέχον effecisti* (9.7.1): "the main point" was to ease Cicero's fears for his reputation'. It is not entirely clear the degree to which Atticus was responsible for gaining the approbation of these men by informing them of the (true) nature of Cicero's decisions and actions, whether in his own letters or by appending those of Cicero himself. None the less, through such connections Atticus was an excellent candidate for disseminating Cicero's side of the story.

⁴¹ Admittedly, it might seem that Cicero is inviting Atticus to share with others the letters he wrote to Cicero, which have been the subject of Cicero's attention in 9.10, rather than the letters Cicero wrote to Atticus, which contain the apologetic story. Whether or not Atticus' letters to Cicero similarly contain allusions to Plato when assessing Cicero's political predicament we simply cannot know. However, the point of the exercise remains the same, namely defending Cicero, and the apologetic message that Cicero develops in his letters to Atticus is pertinent to any such defence.

cf 9.6.5). He then looks at Atticus' letters from 21 January until 9 March as a chronological sequence and makes judgements accordingly on the narrative (9.10.4–9).⁴² We are presented with an image of Cicero rereading Atticus' letters in sequence (like a book), and making connections regarding both text and context (which has been changing over time) in order to (re)interpret the letters' meaning.⁴³ Cicero rereads Atticus' letters in the light of what has happened subsequently – that is the point of the exercise. Nevertheless, Cicero insists that the advice given (and decisions made) at a certain time must be judged according to the situation and knowledge at that time. More importantly, by describing his own interpretative approach, Cicero invites the reader (Atticus and ourselves) to adopt the same method with regard to his own letters.

Cicero's use of the Platonic allusion at 9.10.2 invites us to reread the letters to Atticus also with the *Seventh Letter* alongside and to draw parallels. Cicero invokes the explicitly apologetic nature of the *Seventh Letter* (7.352a1–7); and he also asks us to consider his predicament with Caesar at Rome as being the same as Plato experienced with Dionysius at Syracuse. We sympathise with Plato's plight; therefore, we should also sympathise with Cicero. Further, Cicero's identification of himself with Plato invites us to consider him as a heavyweight philosophical (as well as political) figure. Philosophy and Cicero's philosophical identity are thus immediately established as central elements in the narrative.

At this point, we might ask: how far back do we go in our rereading? Which letters to Atticus should we read through and against Plato's *Seventh Letter*? Given Cicero's account of his own reading of Atticus' letters, 21 January 49 BC seems a natural place to begin, since this is the date of the first of Atticus' letters he revisits. This corresponds with the conjectured composition date

⁴² For discussion of Cicero's construction of the narrative in 9.10 itself, see Hutchinson (1998: 162–71).

⁴³ The impression is that reading a collection of letters as a narrative was done by Cicero's contemporaries in much the same way as we do today; Cornelius Nepos provides a vivid image of just this practice when he recalls being allowed to read Atticus' collection of Cicero's letters (*Att.* 16).

2.4 Unpacking the allusion: the Platonic context

of 7.11 (= 134 SB), and coincides with Cicero learning of Pompey's abandonment of Rome to the advancing Caesar, the very event that has led ultimately to Cicero's sorry situation.⁴⁴ This dramatic event is also a natural starting point for a narrative on the civil war.⁴⁵

2.4 Unpacking the allusion: the Platonic context

In order to comprehend fully Cicero's apologetic story, it is important that we first have a detailed knowledge of the Platonic context evoked by the allusion to the bird. The passage to which Cicero alludes is surprisingly complicated and it raises a number of important issues; here it is once again:

μέχρι μὲν δὴ τούτων ταύτη μοι βεβωτημένον ἐγγόνει φιλοσοφίᾳ καὶ φίλοις· τὸ δὲ μετὰ ταῦτα ἐζῶμεν ἐγὼ καὶ Διονύσιος, ἐγὼ μὲν βλέπων ἔξω, καθάπερ ὄρνις ποθὼν ποθὲν ἀναπτέσθαι, ὁ δὲ διαμηχανώμενος τίνα τρόπον ἀνασοβήσοι με μηδὲν ἀποδοῦς τῶν Δίωνος. ὅμως δὲ ἐφάνημεν ἐταῖροί γε εἶναι πρὸς πᾶσαν Σικελίαν. (Plato, *Epistles* 7.347e6–348a4)

Up until this time it was the case that I had been helping philosophy and my friends in this way; but after this time Dionysius and I lived thus: I gazing outside, like a bird longing to spread my wings in flight from there, he scheming how he might clip my wings, paying none of Dion's money. But in this way to the whole of Sicily we appeared to be comrades.

As we have already seen in Cicero's case,⁴⁶ the image of the bird highlights Plato's true desires and his powerlessness to act upon them: he would have terminated his association with Dionysius and left Sicily given the chance. However, Plato makes it clear that he and Dionysius appeared to be genuine friends (ἐταῖροι) to those in Sicily. A concern to dispel this impression and define the true nature of his relationship with Dionysius is the most obvious thrust of Plato's apology in this passage. Plato makes it clear that in reality their friendship was a façade and that he was under a form of arrest, kept in a cage like a show bird so as to add prestige

⁴⁴ 7.10 = 133 SB was composed on 18 January and 7.12 = 135 SB on 22 January. Knowledge of Pompey's flight from Rome on 17 January first appears in 7.11.

⁴⁵ Note that, in contrast, the ancient editor's narrative on the civil war begins at the start of book 7 (7.1 = 124 SB) after dramatic precursors in 6.8 = 122 SB and 6.9 = 123 SB.

⁴⁶ Section 2.3.1 above.

to the regime. The use of φαίνομαι + infinitive (ἐφάνημεν ἑταῖροί γε εἶναι) refers specifically to a false appearance. Thus, Plato insists that he was not a genuine supporter of Dionysius – any criticism on this score is unfounded, and Plato is beyond reproach for his association with the tyrant.

To be sure, the apology in this passage is actually twofold: on the one hand, it is a rejection of claims that Plato personally was a friend or supporter of Dionysius and his regime; on the other, it is a defence of the effectiveness of philosophy in dealing with people in political power.⁴⁷

The second aspect of the apology is illustrated best by focusing on the passage's μέν ... δέ construction. In the μέν clause we are told that up until this point, namely Dionysius' double-crossing of Plato that left him stranded in Sicily with the sailing season having passed (7.345c4–347e5), Plato had helped φιλοσοφία and his φίλοι. The philosophical digression at 7.340b1–345c3 suggests that he had helped φιλοσοφία via the fact that he himself wrote down none of his (true) philosophy, but rather confronted Dionysius' moral, philosophical, and personal shortcomings in person, in frank dialectical conversation.⁴⁸ He criticised his style of living; he demolished his misguided philosophical writings and his misshapen notions and ideas. In short, he deconstructed a lot of bad philosophy through the practice of dialectic.⁴⁹ The friends he refers to here are Dion and his supporters. He had helped them by acting on their behalf and in their interests during his dealings with Dionysius (7.345c4–347c7). Plato also seems to have considered Dionysius himself a φίλος of sorts

⁴⁷ Lloyd (1990) also considers the *Seventh Letter* to be both a political and a philosophical apology. He argues that the philosophical digression in particular is intended to differentiate Plato's philosophy from that of Archytas of Tarentum. I agree with Lloyd's point, but here focus on other aspects of the philosophical apology.

⁴⁸ On Plato's critique of written philosophy in the philosophical digression, see especially 7.341b5–342a1, 7.342e2–343a9, 7.344c3–d2 (compare also the second Platonic epistle). Similar critiques are made by Socrates elsewhere in the Platonic corpus, most famously in the *Phaedrus* (274e3–279b3). For detailed discussion of Plato's critique of writing, and the problem of his written and unwritten doctrines, see, for instance, Findlay (1974), Guthrie (1978: 418–42), Gaiser (1980), and Burnyeat (1987).

⁴⁹ Lloyd (1990: 163–73) argues that Plato not only criticises the philosophy of Dionysius, but also that of other figures, such as Archytas, who had acted as his philosophy tutors and developed his ideas.

(7.329d3, 7.330a5–6, 7.333d4–7). At least his demolition of Dionysius’ vices and erroneous views was a start in leading both Dionysius and his realm to the good.⁵⁰ We are led to believe that under free and open conditions of φιλία, Plato’s actions as philosophic advisor had been useful, that is, that philosophy had been useful, and that he had therefore been of service to philosophy.

The δέ clause makes it clear that after being double-crossed Plato’s actions were not helpful to φιλοσοφία or his φίλοι; nor was philosophy of much help to him personally – philosophy could not rescue Plato from physical confinement and association with Dionysius. He was no longer of help to his real friends because he himself had fallen out of favour with Dionysius (7.349c5–e9). He was no longer of help to philosophy because philosophy no longer had any sway over Dionysius. The reason for this change is that Dionysius had altered their relationship from that of φιλία to something different, namely, that of jailor to prisoner, bird-keeper to bird, tyrant to subject.⁵¹ Philosophy, in particular dialectic, requires open dialogue, frank speech, freedom in order to be effective – it requires respect and willingness from both sides of the relationship.⁵² Therefore, it is Dionysius’ fault that philosophy was not effective: his moral and intellectual shortcomings brought about the failure of Plato’s mission.⁵³ Philosophy itself is beyond reproach.

Finally, the passage to which Cicero alludes also highlights an important issue in the *Seventh Letter* as a whole: namely, Plato’s own deliberations on the choice of lives. Originally Plato was

⁵⁰ The philosophical digression fosters the impression that Plato employed free and frank speech (παρησία) to this effect (cf *Ep.* 8.354a1–3, 13.362c4–5).

⁵¹ This is the force of the ‘we lived like this’ phrase (τὸ δὲ μετὰ ταῦτα ἐζῶμεν) – previously they had not been living in that sort of servile relationship.

⁵² In the *Seventh Letter* itself Plato stresses the importance of a close philosophical friendship for the goods of philosophy to be realised successfully (7.341c5–d1, 7.327a5–b1, 7.328b1–c3; cf 7.333d7–334a6). This resonates with certain passages from the *Phaedrus* (e.g., 252d1–253c6, 256a6–b6), on which see further Ferrari (1987: 140–203). Plato’s presentation of philosophical practice in the Socratic dialogues highlights the fundamental importance of free and frank speech. For further discussion, see Monoson (1994, 2000) and Saxonhouse (2006: 85–126, 179–205); also Saxonhouse (1996: 87–114).

⁵³ Plato asserts at 7.336b4–c1 that it was Dionysius’ ignorance that caused the failure of his plans *twice*.

content to be living an intellectual life in his native Athens (7.329a7–b3; cf 7.324b8–326b4). He then recounts how Dion on his own initiative saw a chance to put Plato's philosophy into action: he judged conditions to be such that the young Dionysius could be trained into a philosopher-king and that from this great good would come to the realm (7.327b6–328b1). After deliberating on all the relevant factors, Plato says he decided to pursue the political life as philosophic advisor to Dionysius (7.329a7–c1).

In his account of his deliberations Plato says that he decided to go fearing self-reproach 'most of all' μή δόξαιμί ποτε ἑμαυτῷ παντάπασι λόγος μόνον ἀτεχνῶς εἶναι τις, ἔργου δὲ οὐδενὸς ἂν ποτε ἐκῶν ἀνθάψασθαι ('lest I should seem to myself to be wholly and absolutely a mere voice and never willingly to engage in any action', 7.328c5–7). He also reasons that to deny the request of his friend Dion and forsake the task would be explicable only by cowardice or the neglect of the customs surrounding the guest–friend relationship, and hence would bring him great personal dishonour in the eyes of others (7.328c7–329a7, 7.329b3–7). He even suggests that the philosopher who does not at least attempt to apply himself and his theories in the practical realm is deserving of reproach, not just from society in general but also from philosophy herself (7.328e3–5). Thus, by choosing to pursue the political life, Plato claims that he will not only free himself from criticism on the part of philosophy, but also save philosophy herself from reproach arising from his cowardly failure to act (7.329a7–b7).

This might appear surprising. In the *Republic*, for example, we see Socrates respond to Adeimantus' charge that philosophers are useless in contemporary societies in a robust manner: it is not the philosopher's prerogative to act or try and implement theory in such problematic conditions – the philosopher should devote his life to the contemplation of the Forms (496a11–497a7).⁵⁴ However, in the *Republic* as well as in the *Seventh*

⁵⁴ Edelstein (1966: 16): 'he [Plato] emphatically opposes the common Greek opinion that words count less than deeds and maintains that "practical action" (πραχθῆναι) partakes of exact truth less than speech (λέξις) or theoretical reasoning (*Rep.* 5.473a)'. Edelstein thinks that this discrepancy is so great as to prove that Plato himself did not compose the *Seventh Letter*.

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Letter Plato suggests strongly that at the very heart of the philosophical enterprise is a concern to put philosophical theory into practice, to realise on earth 'every good' (*Ep.* 7.328c2–3, 7.337c7–d4; cf *Rep.* 473c–d, 487e, 501e), and that the means to achieve this noble goal is for the philosopher to pursue the political life.⁵⁵

Plato does encourage the life of practical action, but only when conditions are sufficiently conducive for successfully implementing political theory. Plato initially believed such conditions existed and thus he opted for the political life in Sicily. However, in all other cases the philosopher should pursue the intellectual life. This is the mode of life Plato was pursuing at Athens before his involvement with Dionysius. In cases where the philosopher has pursued (correctly) the political life but conditions have then become impossible, the proper course is disengagement, which is just what we see Plato doing (or wishing to do) in the passage of the *Seventh Letter* to which Cicero alludes.⁵⁶ Moreover, the philosopher who acts properly and consistently within this framework cannot be criticised, because he has done the right thing, even if the outcomes of his political engagement are ultimately not positive or desirable.

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These dimensions are all to the fore in Cicero's own apologetic story. He is concerned in the first instance to set on the record that he is powerless to act as he desires: he wishes to leave Italy but is

⁵⁵ See further Reeve (1988: 83–5).

⁵⁶ In support of this account, note that the image of the bird in the *Seventh Letter* is also particularly reminiscent of the description of the madness of love in the *Phaedrus* (249d4–e1); no other ornithological image in the Platonic corpus corresponds so closely to that in the *Seventh Letter*. In the *Phaedrus* Socrates recounts how the madness of love allows one to pursue the blessings of a life spent reflecting on true reality, on the heavenly world of the Forms. This mode of life liberates one's soul from the body and allows it to grow wings and ascend to heaven (249a1–2, 251a2–252a1, 254b3–c3, 256a6–257a2, 257b5–6; cf Plut. *Non posse* 1105d1–9); on the motif of the soul as winged, see Jones (1926). If we stress the parallel, then the image of the bird in the *Seventh Letter* can be interpreted as conveying Plato's desire to leave the political life at Syracuse in return for the contemplative life in which his soul can successfully spread its wings and soar in the heavens.

being forced to stay there with Caesar against his will. Like Plato, he stresses that this enforced association does not make him one of Caesar's ἐταῖροι, though he may appear to be.⁵⁷ Furthermore, he is also concerned to make it clear that his relationship with Caesar is such that philosophy can no longer be of any use. Like Plato, he is offering an apology for the ineffectiveness of philosophy in dealing with someone in power and his own ineffective pursuit of the political life in the role of philosophic advisor. Moreover, like Plato, he makes it clear that he now wishes to pursue the life of *otium*, because conditions are such that proper pursuit of the political life is impossible.

2.5.1 Cicero the philosophic advisor

Before we begin the narrative at 7.11 (= 134 SB) it is useful to have some more context. On the eve of civil war in 50 BC Cicero made a decision to return to Italy in order to foster *concordia* or a victory for the good men (7.1 = 124 SB, 7.3 = 126 SB). However, ties of *amicitia* meant that he had obligations to both Caesar and Pompey (7.1.2–8, 7.8.5 = 131 SB).⁵⁸ Moreover, it was not entirely clear whether siding with Pompey and the *optimates* would in fact be for the good of the *res publica* (7.3.4, 7.5.4 = 128 SB). It is clear that following his return to Italy Cicero considered peace and reconciliation to be by far the most desirable outcome, to be advocated and preferred over civil war at all costs (7.3.5, 7.4.2, 7.5.5, 7.6.2, 7.7, 7.8.4, 7.9.2–4 = 126–32 SB). However, he was also more than aware of the criticism he would face for ‘deserting’ Pompey and pursuing such a goal. This context provides the motivation for Cicero’s adoption of the Platonic mantle of the philosophic advisor.⁵⁹

⁵⁷ Although Cicero leaves the line ἐφάνημεν ἐταῖροί γε εἶναι unsaid in his allusion, the implication is still there.

⁵⁸ Indeed, Cicero was advising both parties on what they should do, Pompey in person (7.3.5, 7.4.2) and Caesar by letter (7.2.7, 7.3.11).

⁵⁹ Note that there were precedents of Greek philosophers acting as advisors to Roman statesmen, Panaetius to Scipio being the most famous example; see further Rawson (1989). Furthermore, this is not a unique action on Cicero’s part: he clearly places himself in the role in 45 BC, when he was composing a letter of advice to Caesar; see further [chapter 5](#) below. It must be stressed that by adopting the role or persona of

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The role clearly suited Cicero's awkward position between Pompey and Caesar. Through it he could circumvent many of the ties of *amicitia* that were troubling him, maintain his independence, and avoid criticism, namely by appeal to philosophy and a principled concern for the *res publica*. And, as it happens, the first strong evidence that Cicero had begun to draw on this philosophical framework appears at the beginning of 7.11:

utrum de imperatore populi Romani an de Hannibale loquimur? o hominem amentem et miserum, qui ne umbram quidem umquam τοῦ καλοῦ viderit! atque haec ait omnia facere se dignitatis causa. ubi est autem dignitas nisi ubi honestas? honestum igitur habere exercitum nullo publico consilio, occupare urbis civium quo facilius sit aditus ad patriam, χρεῶν ἀποκοπᾶς, φυγᾶδων καθόδους, sescenta alia scelera moliri, 'τὴν θεῶν μέγιστην ὥστ' ἔχειν Τυραννίδα'? (Cicero, *Epistulae ad Atticum* 7.11.1)

Are we talking about a general of the Roman people or a Hannibal? O mad and wretched man, who has seen not even the shadow of the good ever! And he says that he is doing all these things for the sake of his dignity. But where is dignity without the good? Is it good, therefore, to have an army with no public authority, to occupy the towns of citizens so as to make easier the route to the fatherland, to cancel debts, to recall exiles, to devise a hundred other evil acts, 'so as to hold Tyranny the greatest of gods?' (= Eur. *Phoen.* 506).

The philosophical language is immediately striking: καλόν and *honestum* are words Cicero uses when he has in mind the very specific idea of the moral good. Cicero has decided to place events within a distinctly philosophical framework, and to judge Caesar accordingly. He presents a philosophical critique of Caesar's actions that appears Stoic in tone.⁶⁰ Caesar claims to be acting for the sake of his dignity, but in order to possess *dignitas* one must possess *honestas* – one must choose to act on the *honestum*. But clearly Caesar is acting in an altogether bad and vicious way: by his actions he is undermining the very goal that he professes to seek! Cicero's rebuke is also evocative of Plato: the reference to

philosophic advisor Cicero does not have to sacrifice his identity as a Roman *consularis*; they complement one another. The freedom to give frank advice, the concern with the public good, and so forth are characteristic of both roles. As we shall see, the significance of the role of philosophic-advisor is that it gave Cicero room to manoeuvre when more traditional and established modes of consular discourse were problematic.

⁶⁰ The argument presented here matches that which Cicero attributes to Zeno at *Academica* 1.7.

the shadow (*umbra*) of the καλόν plays on the famous metaphorical use of this notion in Plato's metaphysics, most famously in the image of the cave in Plato's *Republic* (514a1–521a9).⁶¹ Caesar is ignorant not only of the divine good, but also its earthly, shadowy resemblance. Furthermore, the force of Socrates' argument at this point of the *Republic* is that those who see only the shadows are not properly equipped to rule. Thus, Cicero is in essence saying that Caesar is an exceptionally bad ruler: he comes nowhere near Socrates' ideal. Cicero also criticises Caesar's psychological state in distinctly Platonic terms: Caesar's actions are motivated by a desire for tyrannical power; but, according to Socrates, no rational person should wish for this as it leads to misery and unhappiness (e.g., Plat. *Rep.* 576b7–c4, 579c4–580a8). Thus, Caesar must be mad, sick, irrational. Cicero reiterates this argument after this passage when he writes: *sed ego hoc ipsum velle miserius esse duco quam in crucem tolli. una res est ea miserior, adipisci quod ita volueris* ('But I consider that to want this itself is more wretched than crucifixion. There is only one thing more wretched than it, to obtain what you want', 7.11.2). Evidently, Cicero was already engaging with Platonic texts and doctrines when assessing the political situation well before the allusions to the *Seventh Letter* in March.

It is less clear whether Cicero had adopted the guise of philosophic advisor at this point. He compares himself explicitly to a

⁶¹ See Gildenhard (2006: 198–9). Note that Cicero's use of καλόν does not correspond with the term for the good in Plato's *Republic*, which is ἀγαθόν. However, Cicero consistently uses καλόν when he has in mind the notion of the moral good. Compare his other uses of καλόν: *Fam.* 15.17.3 = 214 SB (text discussed on pages 23–5 above), in a general but broadly Stoic or Academic sense; *Att.* 2.19.1 = 39 SB (text discussed on pages 54–5 above), general scope but possibly with specific reference to Plato's cave; *Att.* 8.8.2 = 158 SB (text discussed on pages 92–3 below), likely with reference to Plato's cave. I identify Cicero's use of καλόν here in 7.11.1 as an allusion to Plato, despite the Stoic resonances, because of certain other Platonic elements in this passage (discussed in this paragraph). It is also worth noting that Cicero quite likely alludes to Plato's cave with the term *umbra* elsewhere. Here are the two most compelling examples: *ego autem, si modo consequi potuero, rationibus eisdem, quas ille [Plato] vidit, non in umbra et imagine civitatis, sed in amplissima re publica enitar, ut cuiusque et boni publici et mali causam tamquam virgula videar attingere* (*Rep.* 2.52); *sed nos veri iuris germanaeque iustitiae solidam et expressam effigiem nullam tenemus, umbra et imaginibus utimur* (*Off.* 3.69). In both cases the broadly Platonic idea of a resemblance to the real thing, the absolute or Form, is clear.

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philosophical theoriser as he makes these criticisms of Caesar: *libenter enim in his molestiis ἐνσχολάζω σοι* ('Even in the middle of these troubles I like to lecture to you [Atticus]', 7.11.2). Furthermore, this passage is an example of frank speech, and this motif is significant – it was an integral aspect of the positive relationship between rulers and philosophic advisors. By asking the reader, who has turned back from 9.10, to begin rereading the apologetic narrative on this note, a continuity is established between Cicero's current position in March, which he has likened to Plato's ultimate predicament in Sicily, and that in January, which we can appreciate was to a certain extent analogous with Plato's original ability to speak frankly and apply philosophical doctrine when dealing with Dionysius.

The remaining letters in book 7 are not vitally important to Cicero's apologetic story. As a whole they serve to present and maintain a positive image of Cicero's motives and decision-making, which is in keeping with 7.11 and 9.10. He is depicted as being deeply concerned that he should act properly – for the good of his family, friends, and the *res publica* – as he ponders the ongoing conflict between the *honestum* and the *utile* (7.12–18, 7.20.2, 7.21.3, 7.23.2 = 135–42, 144–5, 147 SB).⁶² There is great uncertainty over the moral landscape – ἀπορία is often mentioned (7.11.3, 7.12.4, 7.21.3) and Caesar is twice portrayed explicitly as acting like a Greek tyrant⁶³ (7.12.2, 7.20.2) – but Cicero can be seen weighing the competing claims *in utramque partem* and determining his actions as best he can given his knowledge of the present conditions. A desire for *concordia* between the two warring factions, the best outcome for the *res publica*, remains at the centre of his deliberations (7.14.1, 3; 7.17.4; 7.21.3; 7.26.2; cf *Fam.* 16.12.2, 5 = 146 SB).

Cicero's identity as a philosophic advisor is developed most in book 8. Cicero turns more assertively towards philosophy as a discourse in which to judge events and actively work for the good of the *res publica*. Let us consider first 8.2 (= 152 SB). At the start of the letter Cicero professes to be mediating between the two

⁶² See Brunt (1986: 24–31) on Cicero's duty to family and friends in particular.

⁶³ See further Gildenhard (2006: 200–3).

parties: he has sent a letter to Caesar urging reconciliation (*illum ad concordiam hortabar*, 8.2.1; cf *Fam.* 16.12.5). He then criticises Pompey for his failure to act on the *honestum* (8.2.2). Later he writes:

ego pro Pompeio libenter emori possum, facio pluris omnium hominum neminem; sed non ita uno in eo iudico spem de salute rei publicae. significas enim aliquanto secus quam solebas, ut etiam Italia, si ille cedat, putes cedendum; quod ego nec rei publicae puto esse utile nec liberis meis, praeterea neque rectum neque honestum. †sed cur† ‘poterisne igitur videre tyrannum?’ quasi intersit audiam an videam, aut locupletior mihi sit quaerendus auctor quam Socrates, qui, cum XXX tyranni essent, pedem porta non extulit. (Cicero, *Epistulae ad Atticum* 8.2.4)

I am able to die for Pompey willingly; I value no man more highly. But I do not so judge that hope of salvation for the *res publica* rests with him alone. You indicate, in fact, somewhat differently than you usually do, that you think that I should leave Italy, if he leaves it. I do not think that that would be beneficial to the *res publica* nor to my children, moreover neither proper nor morally good. Then: ‘Are you able to bear the sight of a tyrant?’ As if it matters whether I hear him or see him, or as if a more reliable model need be sought for me than Socrates, who, when there were the thirty tyrants, did not set foot outside the gate.

Cicero insists that to stay put in Italy is the best course of action, even if Pompey leaves, in terms of both what is advantageous and what is morally right and honourable. However, if Cicero is going to stay he must then confront the issue of what his relationship with Caesar will be (*poterisne igitur videre tyrannum?*). Cicero has already hinted that Caesar may in fact be a source of salvation for the *res publica* by claiming that he does not think that Pompey is the sole hope.⁶⁴ Furthermore, his letter imploring Caesar to *concordia* can be seen as an example of frank speech: evidently Cicero had good reasons to believe that their relationship was such that he could influence the man in power. It is thus implied that there is a genuine chance that by staying Cicero could work with Caesar for *concordia* and the good of the *res publica*.⁶⁵ However, if Caesar becomes a *tyrannus* and rejects such a free and open

⁶⁴ See Benferhat (2005: 149–51).

⁶⁵ Note that at the end of the letter Cicero professes to be leaving to join Pompey. However, his focus is clearly on fostering peace: *si de pace ageretur, profect<ur>us; si de bello, quid ero?* (8.2.4). As it happens, he is forced to turn back because of the advance of Caesar (8.3 = 153 SB).

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relationship (a fair assumption), how will Cicero act then? It is very significant that Cicero appeals to the historical precedent of Socrates as an exemplar.⁶⁶

We do not possess much evidence for Socrates' actions under the thirty tyrants; Plato and Xenophon are the two key sources (Xen. *Mem.* 1.2.30–9; Plat. *Apol.* 32c3–d8, *Ep.* 7.324c2–325b1), and it seems highly plausible that one or the other was the source behind Cicero's comment here. According to them, when Athens was placed under the rule of the thirty by Sparta in 404 BC, Socrates did not desert the city like many other notable men who fled from fear, had their possessions taken and were exiled, or went into opposition against the new rulers from outside the city.⁶⁷ Rather he continued to be involved in public life: he evidently had dealings with the thirty, some of whom, such as his former student Critias, were men with whom he (and Plato) had close personal ties (Xen. *Mem.* 1.2.30–9; Plat. *Apol.* 32c3–d8, *Ep.* 7.324c2–325b1). Most importantly, he was distinguished by maintaining a frankness with the rulers despite the pressures and dangers of the time. Xenophon recounts how a law was passed forbidding the teaching of 'the art of words' which was directed at Socrates (*Mem.* 1.2.31), in all likelihood because of his outspokenness and stinging questioning and criticism of the regime. For instance, he was prepared to argue that they were bad statesmen (1.2.31–9).⁶⁸ Furthermore, he is presented as not giving up his philosophical principles: he refused orders he thought unjust and maintained his focus on the good. In Plato's *Apology* Socrates himself recounts how he was ordered to arrest Leon of Salamis so that Leon could be executed, but refused to partake in such a dishonourable action and simply went home (32c3–d8); and in the *Seventh Letter* Plato describes how the tyrants ordered Socrates to arrest a condemned citizen so that he would be complicit in their

⁶⁶ See also [chapter 4, section 4.4](#) below.

⁶⁷ For discussion of the thirty tyrants and Athenian politics in 404/403 BC, see Krentz (1982) with further bibliography.

⁶⁸ Memorably, Xenophon (*Mem.* 1.2.30) also recounts how Socrates criticised the tyrant Critias for having the feelings of a pig, since he could not stop rubbing himself against his lover, Euthydemus, in the same manner as a pig rubs himself against a rock, and that Critias held a grudge against him on account of this.

regime but he refused, risking terrible punishment rather than being an agent in such wicked deeds (7.324d6–325a5). Thus, Socrates stayed at Athens during the reign of the thirty tyrants but still acted properly, continued to speak frankly, and refused to give credence or esteem to the regime.

By appealing to the example of Socrates to justify his own proposed actions, Cicero now places himself firmly in a tradition that concerns the relationship between the citizen *philosophus* and the *tyrannus*, between the intellectual and those in absolute power. At this point Cicero has given notice that he will maintain the role of principled philosophic advisor or philosophical critic even if Caesar becomes a tyrant: he claims that he will continue to speak frankly and act properly, whatever the dangers and wicked designs of Caesar. In the context of our rereading of the letters this is deeply ironic, since clearly in March Cicero now wishes he were not in Italy, inside the gate with the tyrant Caesar. However, given the circumstances at this time, Cicero's desire to stay in Italy and deal with Caesar is justifiable: evidently he could speak frankly with him and champion what he thought was the right cause, *concordia*, with what he thought was a genuine chance of success.

There follows a sequence of letters in which Cicero explicitly argues *in utramque partem* (8.3.1) to determine the best course of action: either to stay in Italy with Caesar or to leave if Pompey flees (8.3–7 = 153–7 SB). These deliberations are undermined by a lack of information and the rapidly changing situation – we see that Cicero cannot make a persuasive case for either option. These letters do not add much to the story except to show Cicero constantly weighing what to do in a consistent fashion – his inaction is proper given the conditions. More significantly, when Cicero learns that Pompey has fled to the coast, he criticises him strongly: *o rem turpem et ea re miseram! sic enim sentio, id demum aut potius id solum esse miserum quod turpe sit* ('O disgraceful and therefore wretched business! For I think thus, that wretchedness lies chiefly or rather solely in what is disgraceful', 8.8.1 = 158 SB). He then writes: *fulsisse mihi videbatur τὸ καλὸν ad oculos eius . . . at ille tibi πολλὰ χαίρειν τῷ καλῷ dicens pergit Brundisium* ('It used to seem to me that the good shone

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before his eyes ... but he, utterly bidding farewell to the good, makes for Brundisium', 8.8.2). As with 7.11, this is a rebuke that at first sounds Stoic but resonates more in a Platonic context.

The image of Pompey having the good before his eyes recalls key passages from the *Republic* in which Socrates recounts how the man suited to rule has the good before his eyes, having left the cave and seen the Forms in the rays of the sun (507a1–509b10, 515e6–520d4, 540a4–c2).⁶⁹ It also recalls the famous passage from the *Phaedrus* where Socrates recounts how each individual's soul has an innate, heavenly knowledge of the Forms to some degree (247d1–248e3) and emphasises the importance of the gaze, the sense of vision, for recollecting such knowledge on earth (249e4–250c6, 250d3–251a7).⁷⁰ Thus, via this image Cicero not only implies that he thought that Pompey was a philosopher (248c8–d4), a good man and a good ruler, but also that he thought he was a kindred spirit and so suited to a close philosophical relationship (252e1–5);⁷¹ Cicero thought that Pompey was open to advice and persuasion, and that he would do the right thing. However, Pompey has consistently ignored Cicero's advice (*Att.* 8.3.3), and now he has acted disgracefully. Thus, Cicero rejects his earlier categorisation of Pompey as a philosopher and a good and knowledgeable ruler; later Cicero will label him ἀπολιτικώτατος and ἀστρατηγητότατος (8.16.1 = 166 SB), which places him beneath both the second and third levels of soul (Plat. *Phaedr.* 248d4–e3).

In 8.11.1–2 (= 161 SB) we see the Platonic persona of the philosophic advisor merge with that of the ideal statesman of Cicero's own *De republica*:

levatur enim omnis cura cum aut constitit consilium aut cogitando nihil explicatur. lamentari autem licet illud quidem totos dies; sed vereor ne, nihil cum

⁶⁹ Although there is a strong parallel in terms of the image, note that in the *Republic* Plato uses the term ἀγαθόν rather than καλόν.

⁷⁰ There are nine levels of knowledge that correspond to the nine sorts of soul, descending from the philosopher to the tyrant.

⁷¹ There are precedents for this. For example, in *Att.* 5.5.2 = 98 SB, where Cicero mentions his διαλόγοι *de re publica* with Pompey; compare *Att.* 7.8.4–5 = 131 SB. Also, in a letter to Pompey from 62 BC Cicero suggests that he could be the Laelius to Pompey's Scipio (*Fam.* 7.5.3 = 26 SB).

proficiam, etiam dedecori sim studiis ac litteris nostris. consumo igitur omne tempus considerans quanta vis sit illius viri quem nostris <libris> satis diligenter, ut tibi quidem videmur, expressimus. tenesne igitur moderatorem illum rei publicae quo referre velimus omnia? nam sic quinto, ut opinor, in libro loquitur Scipio: 'ut enim gubernatori cursus secundus, medico salus, imperatori victoria, sic huic moderatori rei publicae beata civium vita proposita est, ut opibus firma, copiis locuples, gloria ampla, virtute honesta sit; huius enim operis maximi inter homines atque optimi illum esse perfectorem volo'. hoc Gnaeus noster cum antea numquam tum in hac causa minime cogitavit. dominatio quaesita ab utroque est, non id actum, beata et honesta civitas ut esset ... an censes nihil inter eos convenire, nullam pactionem fieri potuisse? hodie potest. sed neutri σκοπὸς est ille, ut nos beati simus; uterque regnare vult. (Cicero, *Epistulae ad Atticum* 8.11.1–2)

Indeed, every concern is alleviated when either one has reached a firm decision or nothing is made clear by thinking. It is allowed for one to weep all day long even; but, when I make no progress, I fear lest I am in fact a disgrace to my studies and my writings. Therefore, I spend all my time dwelling on the essential greatness of that man whom I have portrayed conscientiously enough in my books, as it seems to you at least. Therefore, do you remember what I want 'the ideal statesman' (*moderator rei publicae*) to apply to all his actions? For, so I think, Scipio speaks thus in the fifth book: 'just as a favourable voyage is the goal of the pilot, health the goal of the doctor, victory the goal of the general, so the goal of this ideal statesman is the happy life of the citizens – a life strong with wealth, rich in resources, great in glory, honoured for virtue. Indeed, I want him to be the perfecter of this task, the greatest and the best in human society'. Our Gnaeus has never considered this in the past, far less in this present case. Despotism has been sought by both men, and not the happiness and honour of the citizens ... Or do you maintain that there is no chance for them to come together, no chance for there to be an agreement between them? It is possible today. But our happiness is the target of neither man; both want to rule.

Cicero's deliberations in this passage are strikingly similar to those of Plato in the *Seventh Letter*. Although there are no explicit allusions, there are a number of parallels that appear significant, especially given the prevalence of Platonic material in the letters of this period; it seems as if the *Seventh Letter* is a key resource behind Cicero's deliberations in this letter.

First, Cicero displays a strong concern about putting theory into practice. He emphasises that his own work of political theory, *De republica*, is applicable in the realm of practical politics: he stresses that if its precepts are implemented properly then the happiness of the citizens, the ultimate goal of human political

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society, will be realised. The key precepts concern the ideal statesman, the *moderator rei publicae*: if the pre-eminent men at Rome, Pompey and Caesar, can conduct themselves in accordance with the model, then such goods will arise. This clearly accords with what Plato says in the *Seventh Letter* about the implementation of his political theory. It is important that in this passage Cicero does not merely commentate idly on contemporary events in such philosophical terms. Rather he suggests that his written philosophy offers a genuine guide or model for practical action.

Second, like Plato, Cicero admits to an anxiety that he might be a discredit or disgrace to his philosophical precepts (*sed vereor ne ... etiam dedecori sim studiis ac litteris nostris*). In Plato's case, this anxiety arose because others might criticise him on the basis that his theories were mere ideals, not applicable in practice, if he did not pursue the political life when conditions were favourable. Is this the same in Cicero's case? It is clear that Cicero fears discredit because of his long lamentations on the contemporary state of public affairs – such pathetic conduct does not befit the noble deportment or the dynamism of the ideal statesman. It seems that, like Plato, Cicero is concerned that he might be criticised for not putting his precepts into practice, for failing to live up to the model of the *moderator rei publicae* himself. In times of civil strife the ideal statesman is supposed to involve himself in political affairs to foster *concordia* (*Rep.* 6.1–2, 6.11–12).⁷²

Third, like Plato, Cicero is portrayed as having noble motives – it is not for personal glory or power that Cicero wants to implement his theory. Rather, he has the happiness of the Roman people, which only the well-ordered *res publica* can provide, as his end, his σκοπός. This is why he wishes for *concordia*, a necessary condition for the well-functioning state. In contrast, Pompey and Caesar are both motivated by power and personal gain rather than the good of the *res publica*, the happiness of the citizens.

Fourth, Cicero stresses that he has to confront ignorant and bad rulers: conditions are difficult for putting theory into practice since the men in power are both fundamentally misguided on basic ethical

⁷² See further [chapter 3, section 3.4](#) below.

principles; circumstances are such that there is a limited chance of success in moulding them into good statesmen or in reconciling them. Plato encountered the same problem with Dionysius but persevered for a while; he made repeated attempts to make progress. Cicero has also been persevering – he has been advocating *concordia* from the start. This anticipates the criticism Cicero might face if he fails in achieving his goal: it would not be his fault, but rather the blame would have to rest with these bad rulers.

Indeed, this passage serves to portray Cicero as the natural candidate for the *moderator rei publicae* that the state requires: he has the correct end in sight, he is motivated by the right concerns, and he knows what the ideal statesman should do in this situation. To be sure, in this passage Cicero is merely reflecting (*considerans*) on the figure of the ideal statesman and on what the ideal or proper course of action would be. Unsurprisingly, he concludes that it is what he has been doing in practice more or less the whole time: he stresses that the immediate goal is to bring Pompey and Caesar to concord. Indeed, in a letter to Pompey that is appended to this one (8.11D), Cicero explains at considerable length the reasons for his staying in Italy, namely that peace has always been his aim, owing to its expediency, and that he has only ever acted with the good of the *res publica* in mind, a good that would be served by peace. Thus, Cicero emphasises that he has in fact been putting theory into practice all along through his exhortations to both Caesar and Pompey. *Epistulae ad Atticum* 8.11.1–2 is most striking because, as well as comparing himself with the ideal statesman in his own *De republica*, the recurrent parallels with Plato's *Seventh Letter* place Cicero firmly in the role of advisory intellectual or philosophic advisor. The two personae have merged: it seems that, given the current circumstances, the best role for the ideal statesman (Cicero) to adopt is that of advisory intellectual. In keeping with this Platonic self-portrayal, Cicero now depicts his goal and his efforts towards it as a distinctly philosophical mission.

2.5.2 *The philosophical mission: concordia*

This mission to foster peace and reconciliation clearly does not need to be philosophical; but Cicero deliberately presents it as

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such. We have already seen him compare this goal with what is advocated in his own philosophical writings. Additionally, at 8.11.7 Cicero writes: *memini librum tibi adferri a Demetrio Magnete ad te missum* περὶ ὁμονοίας, *eum mihi velim mittas. vides quam causam mediter* ('I remember that a book *On Concord* by Demetrius of Magnesia was being brought to you, dedicated to yourself. Please send it to me. You see what project I am contemplating'). In 8.12.6 he reiterates this request after he asks Atticus whether adopting a *pacifica persona* ('a peace-making role') would be effective (8.12.4 = 162 SB). What project does Cicero have in mind here, and why is this work so important?

It seems that Cicero's *causa* is to work for *concordia* via the medium of philosophy; it is a philosophical mission. At 9.9.2 (= 176 SB) Cicero writes: *quod consules laudas, ego quoque animum laudo, sed consilium reprehendo; discessu enim illorum actio de pace sublata est, quam quidem ego meditabar* ('Because you praise the consuls, I also praise their spirit, but I fault their decision; for their flight has destroyed a peace initiative, which in fact I was pondering'); and he then says that he is returning Demetrius' treatise on account of this. It is not clear from 8.11 or 9.9 what form this *causa* or *actio de pace* would have taken; but it is clear in 8.11 that Cicero was still engaged in correspondence with both Caesar (8.11.5) and Pompey (8.11A–D), and that *concordia* was a recurrent motif in Cicero's letters to both. An open letter of advice modelled on Plato's *Seventh Letter*,⁷³ perhaps sanctioned by the consuls and directed at both Pompey and Caesar, is a plausible candidate.⁷⁴ Indeed, reconciliation is a central theme in Plato's *Seventh Letter*. When Syracuse was plunged into civil strife in 361 BC, Plato says that he aligned himself with the tyrant so as to foster reconciliation between Dion and Dionysius, and he portrays this as part of his philosophical mission: ἤλθον Ἀθηναῖος ἀνὴρ ἐγώ, ἐταῖρος Δίωνος, σύμμαχος αὐτῷ, πρὸς τὸν τύραννον, ὅπως ἀντὶ πολέμου φιλίαν ποιήσαιμι

⁷³ Note that the *Seventh Letter* is presented explicitly as a letter of advice to the supporters of Dion (7.323d8–324b7, 7.330c7–337e2), even though the vast majority of the text is an *apologia* for Plato's own actions.

⁷⁴ Shackleton Bailey (1965–70: 4.341) speculates that Cicero had 'the idea of making a public (?) appeal for peace'.

('I came to the tyrant as an Athenian citizen, as a comrade of Dion, as an ally to him, so that I might bring about friendship instead of war', 7.333d1–3);⁷⁵ evidently Cicero was in a very similar situation – an ally of Pompey, he would associate with the tyrant Caesar only so that he might achieve *concordia* and avoid civil war. But why does he want Demetrius' work, when his own *De republica* seems to contain the relevant resources already?

Unfortunately, we know of this work only through Cicero's letters, and he never mentions the nature of its content in the two weeks before he returns it at 9.9.2. It is not even certain that Demetrius was a philosopher, although his work *On Poets and Authors of the Same Name* was clearly an important source for biographical information on philosophers (e.g., DL 2.52, 2.56–7, 5.3, 5.75, 5.89, 6.79, 6.84, 6.88, 7.31, 7.169, 7.185, 8.84–5, 9.15, 9.27, 9.35, 10.13).⁷⁶ I suggest that *περὶ ὁμόνοιας* may have been a Greek work addressed to a Roman, Atticus, that contained an application of Greek theory on concord to a specifically Roman scenario of intra-class civil strife between aristocrats, for which the examples of Marius and Sulla were still fresh.⁷⁷ A tentative case can be made for this hypothesis.

First, the intra-class nature of the civil conflict is very important, since the dominant classical Greek model is conflict between the classes,⁷⁸ and that is also the dominant model in Cicero's own *De republica*.⁷⁹ In this instance, however, the conflict is between aristocratic individuals, Pompey and Caesar. Significantly, Cicero

⁷⁵ Note also that Plato's *Eighth Letter* is an appeal for concord between Dion's supporters and Dionysius in 353/352 BC.

⁷⁶ On Demetrius' importance as a historian, see especially Mejer (1981) with comprehensive bibliography; he provides the testimonia of *On Poets and Authors of the Same Name*.

⁷⁷ Atticus himself was something of a refugee from this period (Nep. *Att.* 2–4).

⁷⁸ The most famous example is Thucydides' description of the civil strife at Corcyra (3.70–85). There is a vast literature on this subject. See especially De Ste. Croix (1981); also Lintott (1982), Gehrke (1985: 11–199), and Berent (1998) with further references.

⁷⁹ In particular, Cicero's discussion of *concordia ordinum* and the Gracchi (6.2) suggests a concern with class conflict and its role in the breakdown of concord in Roman society; on *concordia ordinum*, see in particular Strasburger (1956: 15–70). Note that in the *De officiis* (1.85–6) Cicero again illustrates how class divisions bring about civil strife at Rome. Here he highlights explicitly that he is following the model of Plato.

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himself refers to the special nature of the current civil struggle in a letter from this period: *quamquam genus belli quod sit vides: ita civile est ut non ex civium dissensione sed ex unius perditionis audacia natum sit* ('Although you see what kind of war it is: it is civil though it is born not from conflict among the citizens but from the recklessness of one desperate citizen', 7.13.1 = 136 SB). It would seem that a different way of looking at the problem of civil strife is warranted in this particular instance, and perhaps in the context of late republican Rome in general.⁸⁰ Indeed, Lucretius focuses on just this sort of individualistic aristocratic competition and its unsavoury outcomes when he treats the topic of civil strife in *De rerum natura* (e.g., 5.1117–42, 5.1418–35).⁸¹ Perhaps Demetrius' treatise was also focused on this sort of civil strife.

More significantly, we have a contemporary example of a treatise in Greek in which Greek political theory is applied to a specifically Roman scenario: namely, Philodemus' *On the Good King according to Homer*. Like περὶ ὁμονοίας it is addressed to a Roman, Lucius Calpurnius Piso Caesoninus, and it is usually dated by scholars to sometime around 58 BC, before Piso's proconsulship in 57–55.⁸² This work, by an Epicurean but perhaps not written from a doctrinal Epicurean standpoint,⁸³ can be interpreted as applying a rather generalised ethical and political framework concerning kingship, illustrated by Homeric quotations and examples, to the specifically Roman problem of how to be a just and successful proconsul, unquestionably a king-like figure.⁸⁴ Perhaps the practice of Greek philosophers composing works

⁸⁰ Note that on the eve of civil war in 50 BC Cicero says to Atticus that he wants to foster *concordia* and mentions the ideal statesman of his own *De republica* (7.3.2). As I note in chapter 3, section 3.4 below, the implication is that the *concordia* he had in mind in 50 BC was between different classes of citizen, the *concordia ordinum* highlighted in the *De republica*. Here we see that the *concordia* required in early 49 does not fit that model; hence the relevance of a different approach to the topic focusing on *concordia* between individuals, between friends.

⁸¹ See McConnell (2012b). On Lucretius' use of the language of Roman politics, see further Fowler (1989: 142–5).

⁸² The date is still uncertain; see Murray (1965: 178–81) and Dorandi (1982a: 40–2).

⁸³ There are many disparate views on the issue; for a useful survey and reassessment of the question, see Benferhat (2005: 219–32). Both McConnell (2010) and Fish (2011) have recently argued that the treatise does in fact sit readily in the Epicurean philosophical tradition, in particular the treatment of kingship.

⁸⁴ See further Murray (1965: 177–82) and Rawson (1975); also Fish (1999).

dedicated to Roman aristocrats that made Greek social and political theory clearly applicable to practical problems in Roman political life was becoming established at this time.⁸⁵ This might explain the importance Cicero attaches to this work of Demetrius: if it offered a model of conflict resolution for Roman aristocrats based on Greek philosophical principles, it would obviously be useful to consult in the present circumstances. On the other hand, Cicero may simply have wanted to read something new for inspiration. We cannot be certain.

In any case, it seems that Cicero had a plan for which philosophical touchstones – his own *De republica*, Plato's *Seventh Letter*, and perhaps Demetrius' *περὶ ὁμονοίας* – were vital. In the letters following 8.11–12 it is not clear whether Cicero ever put this plan into action before Pompey sailed from Brundisium: peace remains a possibility (8.13.1 = 163 SB, 8.15.3 = 165 SB, 8.15A, 9.7.3 = 174 SB, 9.7A, 9.7C) and Cicero is implored by Atticus to come forward as an advocate of peace (9.7.3), but Cicero seems more interested in justifying his conduct in the face of contemporary criticism by the *optimates* (8.12.1–3 = 162 SB, 8.14 = 164 SB, 8.15.1–2, 9.1 = 167 SB); and by returning Demetrius' treatise at 9.9.2 (= 176 SB) it is clear that he had abandoned his initiative after Pompey's flight.

2.5.3 *When the political life goes wrong*

Cicero's mission was a failure; his own actions were ineffectual throughout. The outcome of the political life has been very bad for him personally. It contrasts markedly with the pleasant tranquillity and equanimity he had at Athens before deciding to return to Italy to foster *concordia* or the victory of the *boni* (6.9.4 = 123 SB, 7.1.5 = 124 SB, 7.3 = 126 SB).⁸⁶ Our rereading of Cicero's letters to Atticus in the light of 9.10 allows us to see how Cicero constructs an apology for this on the model of Plato's *Seventh Letter*: in clear and distinct Platonic fashion, he shows that he acted from noble motives, that he had the right goal of *concordia*

⁸⁵ Compare Philodemus, *On the Gods* 1.XXV.22–37 Diels.

⁸⁶ See further [chapter 3](#), [sections 3.4](#) and [3.5](#) below.

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in mind, and that pursuing the active political life to foster this goal was the right thing to do given the circumstances. He had good reasons to think he could succeed in the role of advisory intellectual given the nature of his relationship with both Caesar and Pompey, and success would have realised a great good for the *res publica*. He was justified in not committing wholeheartedly to Pompey and the republicans' military enterprise. Now, however, conditions have changed and there is no chance of success in the role of philosophic advisor. But Cicero's failure to achieve his goal is not by any means the fault of Cicero, who has judged carefully what is proper at all times, nor of philosophy, which offered the correct course of action; it is the fault of the ignorant and bad rulers, Caesar and Pompey.

Having established the reasons for his ultimately ineffective pursuit of the political life, like Plato in the *Seventh Letter* Cicero now expresses a preference for the life of *otium*. Cicero's deliberations on the choice of lives become apparent in 9.4 (= 173 SB),⁸⁷ the first full letter Cicero wrote after he received Caesar's letter (9.6A = 172A SB). This is one of the strangest letters in the entire Ciceronian corpus, and worth presenting almost in full:

sed tamen, ne me totum aegritudini dedam, sumpsī mihi quasdam tamquam θέσεις, quae et πολιτικάι sunt et temporum horum, ut et abducam animum a querelis et in eo ipso de quo agitur exercear. eae sunt huius modi:

εἰ μενετέον ἐν τῇ πατρίδι τυραννουμένης αὐτῆς. εἰ παντὶ τρόπῳ τυραννίδος κατάλυσιν πραγματευτέον, κἂν μέλλῃ διὰ τοῦτο περὶ τῶν ὄλων ἢ πόλεις κινδυνεύσειν. εἰ εὐλαβητέον τὸν καταλύοντα μὴ αὐτὸς αἴρηται. εἰ πειρατέον ἀρήγειν τῇ πατρίδι τυραννουμένη καὶρῷ καὶ λόγῳ μᾶλλον ἢ πολέμῳ. εἰ πολιτικὸν τὸ ἡσυχάζειν ἀναχωρήσαντά ποι τῆς πατρίδος τυραννουμένης ἢ διὰ παντὸς ἰτέον κινδύνου τῆς ἐλευθερίας πέρι. εἰ πόλεμον ἐπακτέον τῇ χώρᾳ καὶ πολιορκητέον αὐτὴν τυραννουμένην. εἰ καὶ μὴ δοκιμάζοντα τὴν διὰ πολέμου κατάλυσιν τῆς τυραννίδος συναπογραφπτέον ὅμως τοῖς ἀρίστοις. εἰ τοῖς εὐεργέταις καὶ φίλοις συγκινδυνευτέον ἐν τοῖς πολιτικοῖς κἂν μὴ δοκῶσιν εὖ βεβουλευῆσθαι περὶ τῶν ὄλων. εἰ ὁ μέγιστος τὴν πατρίδα εὐεργετήσας δι' αὐτὸ τε τοῦ<το> ἀνήκεστα παθῶν καὶ φθονηθεὶς κινδυνεύσειεν ἂν ἐθελοντῆς ὑπὲρ τῆς πατρίδος ἢ ἐφετέον αὐτῷ ἑαυτοῦ ποτε καὶ τῶν οἰκειοτάτων ποιεῖσθαι πρόνοιαν ἀφεμένῳ τὰς πρὸς τοὺς ἰσχύοντας διαπολιτείας.

⁸⁷ Note that Atticus seems to have suggested that Cicero change his mode of life as early as 3 March: *et taut hemonis t fugam intendis commutationemque vitae tuae, quod tibi puto esse faciendum* (8.15.1 = 165 SB).

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in his ego me consultationibus exercens et disserens in utramque partem tum Graece tum Latine et abduco parumper animum a molestiis et τῶν προῦργου τι deliberō. (Cicero, *Epistulae ad Atticum* 9.4.1–3)

But nevertheless, lest I give myself up wholly to mental distress, I have chosen for myself some general questions as it were, which are both political and appropriate to the times, so that I may both distract my mind from its troubles and keep it focused on the very thing which is at issue. This sort of stuff:

Should one remain in one's fatherland when it is under a tyranny? Should one make efforts to overthrow a tyranny by every means, even if the state in its entirety will be endangered because of this? Should one beware of the overthrower lest he himself be instated as a tyrant? Should one try to help one's fatherland under a tyranny by a fitting act or by speech rather than by war? Is living tranquilly out of the way while one's fatherland is under a tyranny statesmanlike, or should one undertake every danger for the sake of freedom? Should one wage war on one's land and blockade it when it is under a tyranny? Should one enrol oneself with the best men, even if one does not approve of overthrowing the tyranny through war? Should one join in the dangers with one's friends and benefactors in politics even if one does not approve of their actions in capital matters? Should he who has rendered his fatherland great service and because of it caused himself irreparable suffering and enmity voluntarily put himself in danger on behalf of his fatherland, or should he be allowed to act for himself and his family, giving up political opposition to those in power?

Exerting myself on these deliberations and setting out the arguments on either side now in Greek and now in Latin I both lead my mind away from my troubles for a while and ponder matters of relevance.

Cicero professes to be deliberating in Greek and Latin on θέσεις – set themes or general questions. These are philosophical exercises that were associated closely with idle *otium*.⁸⁸ in *De oratore* Cicero discusses *incipites disputationes, in quibus de universo genere in utramque partem disseri copiose licet* ('non-committal debates in which it is allowed to forward copious points on both sides of the argument with regard to the general question'), and he says that this practice is now attributed to the Peripatetics and Academics specifically (3.107–8). Cicero then provides a number of examples of this sort of reasoning, which correspond closely in

⁸⁸ On the θέσις, see Clarke (1951); on its association with *otium*, see further Bonner (1949: 1–50). Clarke (1951) argues convincingly that, in Cicero's time, the θέσις is to be distinguished from the *suasoria* and the *controversia* most associated with Roman rhetorical education in the imperial period.

2.5 Cicero's apologetic story

form to the questions in 9.4.2, and notes that the practice took place in Philo's school (3.108–15); evidently the *θέσις* was a special aspect of Academic philosophical training.⁸⁹ Cicero's admission that he is arguing *in utramque partem* on these *θέσεις* makes it clear that he was applying a philosophical framework in order to judge events.⁹⁰

All these general questions in 9.4.2 concern practical ethics when one is subject to the special conditions of tyranny. Hence, they are highly relevant to Cicero's present situation, as he himself notes.⁹¹ This helps to explain why Cicero has spent his time in pursuits normally associated with idle *otium* and intellectual theorising.⁹² He has done such exercises not only to alleviate his mental distress but also, it seems, because they may provide some guidance – by arguing *in utramque partem* there is the possibility that he might determine a clear course of action. It also helps to explain his concentrated use of Greek in this letter. Cicero employs the Greek language of tyranny to stress to Atticus the alienness of the situation: being subject to a tyrant is a typically Greek rather than Roman situation.⁹³ It is something someone might have expected to see in Syracuse in the fourth century BC, but not at Rome in the first. In this sense it is surely significant that the questions Cicero posits are, on the whole, issues of the sort considered by Plato in the *Seventh Letter*; Plato in fact more or less answers many of them for Cicero. For example, Plato argues

⁸⁹ Reinhardt (2000: 540–2) suggests that in 9.4 Cicero was applying a rhetorical and philosophical method he himself had learnt in Philo's school; see also Clarke (1951: 161–3) and Michel (1960: 589–90). Notably, Stobaeus reports that Philo considered such general questions on practical ethics in his *On Modes of Life* (2.40.22–41.13 Wachsmuth; cf Cic. *De or.* 3.112). For detailed discussion, see further Brittain (2001: 255–342).

⁹⁰ Griffin (1989: 34) is surely correct to say that 'it was not just for intellectual exercise that Cicero in March of 49 ... was debating in Greek and in Latin a series of philosophical *θέσεις* on tyranny ... philosophy does not tell Cicero what to do ... it provides him with the terms in which to cast the problem'.

⁹¹ Gildenhard (2007: 41) comments: 'none of the theses that Cicero sets himself could be more specific. Without exception, they pinpoint crucial dilemmas, which he was compelled to ponder'.

⁹² Such declamations on general questions, although ostensibly being for the training of the future orator and statesman, were generally considered to be largely abstract and only obliquely applicable to practical problems. See Bonner (1949: 71–83) for discussion of such criticisms.

⁹³ See Gildenhard (2006).

strongly that in adverse political conditions, such as tyranny, one should stay quiet and out of the way rather than challenge the bad regime through violence or civil war (7.331c6–d5).

Indeed, Cicero is deliberating on a number of ethical questions pertinent to the question of the best life. The vocabulary is suggestive of an interest in the question: ἡσυχάζειν, for example, is often associated with abstention from political life and *otium*. But Cicero comes to no explicit conclusions, and we are not even given an insight into the nature of his reasoning on the questions. It appears as if he is not committed strongly to either option – as he himself suggests in 9.9.1 (= 176 SB), the questions are perhaps too hard to judge (*sed sunt quaedam earum perdifficiles ad iudicandum*) – but it is clear that he is considering the issue in some depth.

Cicero's uncertainty on what life to prefer in the present instance is manifest in the letters leading up to 9.10 (= 177 SB). There is some indication in 9.4 that Cicero was favouring the life of *otium*. The language suggests a division between the dangerous (undesirable) political life and the tranquil (desirable) life of retirement: for example, κινδυνεύειν and its cognates appear four times with regard to being involved actively in political affairs. There is a stark contrast being made, even though Cicero presents no conclusion. But, on the other hand, he seems resigned to choosing the political life. In the next letter he writes: *ego enim non iam id ago, mihi crede, ut prosperos exitus consequar. sic enim video, nec duobus his vivis nec [hoc] uno nos umquam rem publicam habituros. ita neque de otio nostro spero iam nec ullam acerbitatem recuso* ('Indeed, believe me, I no longer aim to find a happy outcome; thus indeed I see that in the lifetime of those two or one singularly we will never have a *res publica*. And so now I neither hope for a life of *otium* for myself nor am I reluctant for any bitter pill', 9.7.1 = 174 SB). Despite suggesting that he really prefers the life of *otium*, Cicero seems committed to playing an active role with Pompey (9.7.3–5), although it is against his better judgement and ancient authority, perhaps including that of Plato (*contra mehercule meum iudicium et contra omnium antiquorum auctoritatem*, 9.7.5).

In 9.9 and 9.10, however, we get the distinct impression that Cicero wishes to abandon the pursuit of politics and pursue whole-heartedly the life of *otium*. He writes again to Atticus:

2.5 Cicero's apologetic story

<tem>ptaboque, ut antea ad te scripsi, ecquonam modo possim voluntate eius nullam rei publicae partem attingere ('I shall test, as I wrote to you beforehand, whether there is any way that I am able with his consent to play no part at all in political life', 9.9.1; cf 9.6.6). The theme of escape into the intellectual life of philosophical reflection is clear. We see Cicero acting as though he were already retired from the political fray, even though he has to rely on Caesar's assent to abstain from politics. Cicero admits to theorising like a sophist while in the country despite the urgency of the situation: *faciamus igitur ut censes, colligamusque nos*. σοφιστεύω enim simul ut rus decurro atque in decursu θέσεις meas commentari non desino; sed sunt quaedam earum perdifficiles ad iudicandum ('Therefore, let me do as you advise, and let me gather myself together. For as soon as I run down to the country I act like a sophist and on the way I do not desist deliberating on my *theses*; but some of them are very difficult to judge', 9.9.1). Although he professes to be deliberating on the *theses* of 9.4 still, and still to have come to no conclusion on what mode of life or course of action is best in the circumstances, Cicero depicts himself as prone to go off to the country (*rus*), in retreat from the city and the life of politics. The refuge of the country is a stock image in Roman depictions of *otium*, and *decurro* is suggestive of taking refuge from active public life.⁹⁴

This desire for *otium* and retirement from active involvement in political affairs reaches a climax with the allusion to Plato's bird at 9.10.2 and the following comment:

aetas iam a diuturnis laboribus devexa ad otium domesticarum me rerum delectatione mollivit. nunc si vel periculose experiundum erit, experiar certe ut hinc avolem. ante oportuit fortasse; sed ea quae scrips[ist]i me tardarunt et auctoritas maxime tua. (Cicero, *Epistulae ad Atticum* 9.10.3)

Already an age declining from my long labours has softened me contentedly towards the *otium* of domestic affairs. Now even if it will have to be attempted with danger, I shall certainly attempt to fly away from here. Perhaps I should have done so earlier; but the things which I have written and above all your advice held me back.

⁹⁴ The identification of *rus* with *otium* can be seen vividly in Horace's second *Epoë* for instance. See also [chapter 1](#), [section 1.2](#) above.

We can speculate that arguing *in utramque partem* has led Cicero to prefer this course of action: now that the chance of successfully implementing philosophy is gone (*nunc mihi nihil libri, nihil litterae, nihil doctrina prodest*, 9.10.2),⁹⁵ the alternative of flying away, perhaps to a detached *otium* in Malta or perhaps to Pompey who has already flown over the sea to Greece, is to be preferred. This is consistent with Plato's deliberations on the choice of lives in the *Seventh Letter*; following Plato, it is the correct position for Cicero to hold in this situation, whatever his earlier preferences and actions.

However, clearly Cicero's choice is empty, because he cannot freely fly away. He still has to deal with Caesar in some capacity in the future; he still has to respond to his letter requesting his *gratia*, *dignitas*, *consilium*, and help in all things (9.6A = 172A SB).

2.6 Back to the present: transforming Caesar's letter

In his letters to Atticus between 9.10 and 9.18 (= 177–87 SB), which contain a vivid account of their actual meeting, Cicero attempts to decipher exactly what Caesar meant when he referred to his *consilium*, *gratia*, and *dignitas*, and how he expected him to act in response to his letter (9.11.2, 9.11A (to Caesar himself), 9.13.3–4, 9.15.2–4, 9.16).⁹⁶ With this commentary Cicero invites us, the reader, to reconsider constantly the real meaning of Caesar's letter. As we shall see, our interpretation of Caesar's letter in the 'Ciceronian' context differs markedly from our earlier charitable reading.⁹⁷

Consider again the Platonic allusion in 9.13.4:⁹⁸ *ego autem non tam γοητείαν huius timeo quam πειθανάγκην*. 'αί γὰρ τῶν τυράννων δεήσεις' *inquit* Πλάτων 'οἷσθ' ὅτι μεμιγμέναι ἀνάγκαις' ('I fear not so much his guile as his compulsion masquerading as persuasion. "For", said Plato, "the requests of tyrants are mixed with compulsion you know"'). In assessing Caesar's request,

⁹⁵ In particular, *doctrina* refers to philosophical tenets.

⁹⁶ White (2003: 83) remarks: 'this repeated scrutiny of Caesar's letter is the most vivid performance of hermeneutical anxiety in the published correspondence'.

⁹⁷ Section 2.2 above. ⁹⁸ Discussed briefly in section 2.1 above.

let us consider first the two Greek terms prefacing the quotation: γοητεία and πειθανάγκη.

What is clearly at issue here for Cicero is the *form* (particularly the relationship between the form and the force) of Caesar's request in 9.6A. γοητεία and πειθανάγκη are terms concerned with assent and the relationship of power between the speaker and the audience.⁹⁹ γοητεία conveys the idea of the bewitching power of words, how they can compel one to assent unwittingly to the request or proposition of the speaker. Cicero makes it clear that he does not fear being persuaded by Caesar's rhetorical guile or skill: he would decline the request to meet with Caesar if free to do so (9.6.6 = 172 SB, 9.7.3 = 174 SB, 9.9.1–3 = 176 SB). In contrast, πειθανάγκη conveys the idea of evident force or compulsion that can compel one to assent unwillingly to the request or proposition of the speaker. πειθανάγκη also conveys the crucial notion that the compulsion is disguised as genuinely persuasive rhetoric (this is the force of the πειθ- prefix). Thus, on the surface it would appear as if the speaker is seeking willing assent through argument. However, assent is won instead via the audience's fear of the consequences of refusal. The audience does not have a genuine choice whether to assent.

It is vital to stress that πειθανάγκη carries with it the notion of perverting a form of discourse in which freedom is central, in particular freedom to deny, decline, or speak frankly. Cicero is worried that Caesar's request in 9.6A is a demand from a superior, from a tyrant, masquerading as a request from a friend. Moreover, he is worried that even if he assented to the request, he would be expected or even forced to act in a certain manner; he would be a mere puppet (9.6.6, 9.7.3, 9.9.1–3). In neither case would he be genuinely free to act as he saw fit.¹⁰⁰

⁹⁹ γοητεία has a rhetorical pedigree going back to Gorgias (*Hel.* 10) and Plato. Perhaps surprisingly, πειθανάγκη appears to be a later construction. The *Suda* defines it as ἡ μετὰ βίας πειθώ. This general idea is apparent in earlier authors, but Polybius is our earliest extant source for using the term (*Fragmenta ex incertis libris* 194 Büttner-Wobst; cf 21.42.7); the *Suda* cites his usage. It is perhaps from Polybius that Cicero appropriated the term.

¹⁰⁰ In 9.11A = 178A SB he elaborately and carefully expounds at length to Caesar how he wishes to act in response to his request. White (2003: 83) comments: 'rather than ask Caesar what he meant, however, Cicero proceeds to tell him what he hoped he meant'.

Clearly we are pressured into interpreting Caesar's letter as a brilliant instance of πειθανάγκη. As we have seen in our first reading, Caesar requests Cicero's help in terms of *amicitia* and thanksgiving, using persuasive rhetoric in the process.¹⁰¹ When we read 9.6A in the context of the *Epistulae ad Atticum* the letter is transformed, as we perceive how Caesar's deferential and respectful words hide the true nature of the request: if Cicero were to reject Caesar's request, in the face of his thanks and goodwill, he would be stating that he was not an ally, and hence open to Caesar's wrath while being far from safety with Pompey and company.¹⁰² There would clearly be grave consequences of such an action: the circumstances of the time guaranteed that Cicero would have to assent to Caesar's request (which Caesar knew full well). Hence, even if Cicero did not want to be involved with Caesar and his regime, he would have to assent unwillingly: that is the point he is making to Atticus in 9.13.4 via the Greek terms and the quotation from Plato.

However, unwilling assent to Caesar's apparently friendly request also had unsavoury consequences for Cicero's public image: it supported the impression that Caesar had been generating all along, that he was an ally. Cicero's presentation of Caesar invites us to interpret their relationship (and Cicero's own subsequent actions) differently.

2.6.1 *The new Plato and the new Dionysius*

The Platonic allusion in 9.13.4 invites us to interpret Cicero's relationship with Caesar in a very specific way. Cicero presents his relationship with Caesar not merely in general terms as that between a tyrant and a subject, but rather in the same terms as Plato presents his relationship with Dionysius: Caesar is implicitly portrayed as the new Dionysius, Cicero the new Plato, the intellectual or philosopher forced to serve a tyrant *unwillingly*.

¹⁰¹ See [section 2.2](#) above.

¹⁰² Note Cicero's concerns at 8.3.5 = 153 SB about Caesar's retribution if he should side completely with Pompey.

2.6 Back to the present: transforming Caesar's letter

From what we saw in the apologetic story,¹⁰³ Cicero had a free choice between January and early March to pursue the political life and associate with Caesar as an intellectual advisor, and he was justified in choosing to do so; the difference is that now he has no free choice – he is being coerced against his will.

Cicero had in fact been presenting the relationship in such terms since receiving Caesar's letter. He says to Atticus that Caesar made his request *paucis . . . quidem verbis sed ἐν δυνάμει* ('with few words indeed, but with power', 9.6.6).¹⁰⁴ The message was clear to Cicero: submit and serve. The phrase *ἐν δυνάμει* creates the impression that Cicero was immediately quite aware that Caesar's request for his counsel and the like was in fact a demand from a superior.

The use of Greek in itself creates the impression that their relationship is not normal; there has been a perversion of Roman social norms. Roman observers would naturally interpret their relationship in Roman terms as *amicitia*, but the use of Greek to describe Caesar's superior position colours this impression: it is not a normal Roman relationship of *amicitia* at all. Gildenhard comments perceptively: 'Cicero's Platonic self-fashioning . . . implies a social formation foreign to Rome'.¹⁰⁵ In fact, the Greek language of tyrannical power (*δύναμις, τύραννος, ἀνάγκη*) highlights the true nature of their relationship, the Latin language of *amicitia* the façade. But why should Cicero use Greek to convey this crucial idea?

2.6.2 Cicero's Platonic self-fashioning and the use of Greek

Unfortunately, Cicero's code-switching into Greek in other letters to Atticus is not particularly helpful for us when we judge the significance of the Greek in this instance.¹⁰⁶ Indeed, Cicero's use

¹⁰³ Section 2.5 above.

¹⁰⁴ The phrase *ἐν δυνάμει* at first appears somewhat strange, but it appears in the Platonic corpus with the same general meaning that Cicero conveys here (*Rep.* 567b3, *Ep.* 7.351a4). White (2003: 81–2) renders the text as *σὺν δυνάμει*, although I can find no manuscript support for this reading.

¹⁰⁵ Gildenhard (2006: 205).

¹⁰⁶ For general discussion of Cicero's code-switching, see Dunkel (2000), Swain (2002), and especially Adams (2003: 308–47). See also the bibliography in the Introduction, n. 32 above.

of Greek in the letters is multi-faceted to such a degree that it must be judged on a case-by-case basis. Cicero sometimes uses Greek as a way in which to avoid direct confrontation of a difficult subject. Adams writes: 'code-switching into Greek is without question sometimes adopted by Cicero and others as a form of distancing or euphemism'.¹⁰⁷ On this account, the use of the phrase ἐν δυνάμει and the quotation from Plato would allow Cicero to comment more comfortably on the unpleasant and awkward matter of the reality behind his relationship with Caesar.¹⁰⁸ Cicero's use of Greek in the letters is also frequently jocular or ostentatiously clever.¹⁰⁹ Indeed, Adams asserts in summary: 'it is justifiable to treat his code-switching as contrived and artificial, and ... as a game played with Atticus'.¹¹⁰ That would mean that, by quoting Plato, Cicero is playing an intellectual game as much as anything else. Certainly he expects Atticus to recognise the allusion and to appreciate the aptness of it without too much prompting. And we cannot ignore the fact that the quotation from Plato (and the oxymoron πειθανάγκη too) is obviously chosen in part owing to its black irony, which reflects well on Cicero's urbanity, his wit and cleverness. In both these examples, the Greek would be seen as providing some distance between Cicero and what he is saying, perhaps allowing him to play down the implications regarding his relationship with Caesar if need be.¹¹¹ However, it seems that the switching into Greek at the precise point of the discussion about which Cicero was most sensitive, namely the true power dynamic in his relationship with Caesar, stresses the importance of this issue rather than provides distance from it.

¹⁰⁷ Adams (2003: 311; see also 330–5). Compare von Albrecht (1973: 1274–5) and Dunkel (2000: 127).

¹⁰⁸ Compare Cicero's similar use of Greek in a later letter to Caesar (*Fam.* 13.15 = 317 SB). See also Hutchinson (1998: 15), who speaks of the 'distance, and the community, of cultured discourse' that Greek provided when discussing difficult, unpleasant, or sensitive political issues.

¹⁰⁹ See further Baldwin (1992: 4–12), Dunkel (2000: 128), and Adams (2003: 312–19).

¹¹⁰ Adams (2003: 343).

¹¹¹ Ahl (1984: 186–7) makes the point that leaving the audience to draw out the unspoken implications, even if they were rather obviously implied, was an established rhetorical tactic in 'figured speech' and 'safe criticism' under a tyranny; see also Dubuisson (1992: 193–4) and Dunkel (2000: 128).

2.6 Back to the present: transforming Caesar's letter

The explanation for Cicero's use of Greek at this point relies on his apologetic project, the Platonic narrative that runs through the letters to Atticus at this period. It is clear that Cicero was placing himself in the position of Plato under the despotism of Dionysius, and the Greek is part of the Platonic milieu. As noted earlier, being subject to a tyrant is a typically Greek experience, and as such Greek is the natural language for this context. Thus, in a simple sense, the Greek adds weight or force to the points made by Cicero that rely on the framework of the Platonic paradigm for their meaning or significance.

But it is also important that the use of Greek allows Cicero to keep the Roman façade of *amicitia* largely in place, and as such Cicero could continue to use Latin to operate in that alternative framework. It must be stressed that it was vital for Cicero that he should have, or at least be seen as having, a genuine relationship of *amicitia* with Caesar.¹¹² It placed him intimately within the political decision-making and power centre, which revolved around Caesar himself, and hence offered a degree of protection, prestige, and influence. And, needless to say, it was very dangerous to be in Italy and not be Caesar's *amicus* at this time. We can infer that Cicero wanted to be seen as Caesar's *amicus* to some degree.¹¹³ Yet Cicero also wished to escape the charges that would be directed at him on account of the intimacy of his relationship with Caesar (9.6.4–7 = 172 SB, 9.7.1–6 = 174 SB). The delicacy of the situation and the importance of conveying to Atticus the true nature of what is real and what is façade make code-switching into Greek from Latin understandable: the use of two languages clearly demarcates the line of reality and façade, and yet also keeps the façade in place. Cicero could operate on the level of appearance, in the Latin framework of *amicitia*, while being judged on the level of reality, the Greek framework of tyranny. And it is the ultimate aim of his Platonic

¹¹² See Marchetti (2003–4: 288); also Brunt (1986: 22). The façade of friendship that is played out in the letters has duped some. Pauli (1958: 131) thinks that the letters of 49 'do credit to the character of both men' and that 'under trying circumstances both show remarkable restraint and courtesy to each other'.

¹¹³ A comment such as *sed illum maiores mihi gratias agere quam vellem* (9.6.6) suggests that degree was the key concern for Cicero.

self-fashioning in these letters after 9.6A to convey powerfully to Atticus (and others) that he was now compelled to act a certain way, to act out a façade or farce with Caesar, but should be judged on the level of reality.¹¹⁴

2.7 Conclusion

Cicero uses his letters to Atticus to create a positive story of his political conduct in the civil war.¹¹⁵ Cicero employs a Platonic model for this epistolary *apologia*. As well as further reaffirming Cicero's appropriation of Platonic modes of literary composition, this encourages us to consider these letters to Atticus not as intimate or somehow detached from the public political realm but, like Plato's *Seventh Letter*, as a genuine intervention in it. The carefully constructed apologetic narrative in Cicero's letters to Atticus from early 49 deserves to be recognised as a genuine piece of philosophical-political autobiography; it can be considered the counterpart to Plato's *Seventh Letter* in Cicero's philosophical oeuvre.

Cicero appropriates a wide range of arguments, conceptual resources, language, identities, and roles from the rich Platonic milieu in the *Seventh Letter*. Cicero presents these in his letters to Atticus as positive resources with which to engage in practical politics, and he explores a number of dimensions in which they might be used or applied effectively in Roman political life. This is most apparent with respect to Cicero's portrayal of

¹¹⁴ This is particularly pertinent to the interpretation of 9.11A = 178A SB, Cicero's rather sympathetic letter to Caesar in reply to 9.6A = 172A SB that had become *pervulgata*, and also to the imminent meeting of the two (which would have been widespread knowledge at the time), which Cicero recounts in 9.18 = 187 SB. As it happens, in 9.18 Cicero paints a vivid picture of how he extricated himself from acting as a dynamic agent of Caesar by (like Socrates under the thirty tyrants) maintaining his position on the need for *concordia*, speaking frankly, refusing to compromise his principles, and declining to offer uncritical support to Caesar's new order.

¹¹⁵ This is significant regardless of whether it offers an accurate historical account of Cicero's actions in early 49 BC. Note that there were alternative accounts of Plato's political dealings in Italy and Sicily that presented him in a less favourable light; see further Morrow (1962: 17–44) and Edelstein (1966: 5–69).

2.7 Conclusion

himself in the Platonic role of philosophic advisor, a position which allows him to apply readily philosophical principles in his political dealings and to probe in practice the limits of philosophy's effectiveness in Roman practical politics. In this role, drawing on further Platonic concepts, Cicero highlights the conditions and relationships required for successful application of philosophical precepts and advice at Rome – such as a relationship of *amicitia* and the employment of free and frank speech – and the reasons why they might collapse and philosophy fail to be effective, here emphasising the shortcomings of those in power (he uses Platonic doctrine to portray Caesar and Pompey as tyrants and of degenerate character) rather than any personal fault of his own or any inadequacy in philosophy itself. It is strongly implied that philosophy – and Platonic philosophy especially – is a genuinely effective tool to apply to Roman practical politics, at least given a certain well-defined set of conditions.

To be sure, Cicero's Roman credentials are also to the fore throughout this Platonic narrative. Although the letters to Atticus are peppered with Platonic allusion and we are intended to identify Cicero with the Plato of the *Seventh Letter*, we are just as much intended to identify him as *conservator rei publicae*, *pater patriae*, and the ideal statesman of his own *De republica*. Cicero is of course not portraying himself strictly as a Greek in the mould of Plato, as a philosopher meddling in the political affairs of another state. Rather, he presents himself as essentially a distinguished republican Roman statesman in the unfamiliar and alien position of having to deal with men in absolute power from a position of political weakness. In this position, he draws heavily on the example of Plato the philosophic advisor, and on certain philosophical resources concerning tyranny and practical ethics as appropriate (if ultimately ineffective) means through which to engage in positive political conduct and as a framework in which he might be judged sympathetically.

Chapters 1 and 2 have exhibited Cicero's serious and sophisticated use of Platonic philosophy, and in particular the Platonic letters with respect to a number of ethical and political issues.

But in his letters Cicero does not engage seriously and deeply only with Platonic material in this regard: in the following chapters we shall see additional dimensions of Cicero's philosophical knowledge and practice as he employs a number of different philosophical resources, approaches, and interests when engaging with such issues.

CHAPTER 3

CICERO AND DICAERCHUS

In this chapter I focus on Cicero's engagement in his letters with the philosophical tenets of a key Peripatetic figure: Dicaearchus.¹ Let us take as a starting point the following famous passage from April 59 BC:

nunc prorsus hoc statui ut, quoniam tanta controversia est Dicaearcho, familiari tuo, cum Theophrasto, amico meo, ut ille tuus τὸν πρακτικὸν βίον longe omnibus anteponat, hic autem τὸν θεωρητικόν, utrique a me mos gestus esse videatur. puto enim me Dicaearcho adfatim satis fecisse; respicio nunc ad hanc familiam quae mihi non modo ut requiescam permittit sed reprehendit quia non semper quierim. qua re incumbamus, o noster Tite, ad illa praeclara studia, et eo unde discedere non oportuit aliquando revertamur. (Cicero, *Epistulae ad Atticum* 2.16.3 = 36 SB)

Now that things are so, I have concluded that, since your friend Dicaearchus is in so great a disagreement with my friend Theophrastus, considering that your man prefers the active life by far over all others, mine on the other hand the contemplative, both appear to have been humoured by me. For I think that I have done enough to satisfy Dicaearchus; now I turn to this school, which not only permits me to rest but reprehends me because I was not always at rest. Therefore, let me throw myself, my dear Titus, on those splendid studies, which I should never even have left and to which I shall now at last return.

Evidently, Dicaearchus was a figure in Cicero's political and philosophical deliberations some years before he composed his philosophical works.² In this letter to Atticus he appears a central figure in the contemporary debate surrounding the question of the best life, a subject that was an ongoing preoccupation for Cicero. Unlike Theophrastus, however, Dicaearchus is not mentioned or discussed explicitly in any of Cicero's philosophical works that

¹ This chapter is an expanded version of McConnell (2012a), 'Cicero and Dicaearchus', *Oxford Studies in Ancient Philosophy* 42: 307–49. Sections 3.1–3.4 are reproduced with very minor revisions.

² See chapter 1, section 1.2 for discussion of 2.16.3 with regard to the political circumstances in April 59 BC.

handle the topic – not in *De oratore*, not in *De republica*, not in *De finibus*, and not in *De officiis*.³ Furthermore, unlike with Theophrastus, whose argument for the supremacy of the *theōrētikos bios* appears more or less in keeping with that of Aristotle in the tenth book of the *Nicomachean Ethics* (Cic. *Fin.* 5.12),⁴ we do not possess a clear, uncomplicated account of Dicaearchus' argument for the supremacy of the *praktikos bios* in the surviving testimonia on his work;⁵ nor have modern scholars yet been able to offer a convincing reconstruction of it or its influence. It is vital, if we are to appreciate fully Cicero's engagement with Dicaearchus' philosophical tenets, that we have a firm grasp of Dicaearchus' argument for the supremacy of the *praktikos bios*.

Thus, in the first three sections of this chapter I offer a reconstruction of Dicaearchus' argument and his place in the Peripatetic tradition. As well as providing us with valuable resources to understand better Cicero's philosophical practice, this is intended to demonstrate some of the ways in which we can employ Cicero's letters to fill major gaps in our knowledge of Hellenistic philosophy and its reception in the first century BC. I then consider how Dicaearchus figures in Cicero's political and ethical deliberations by analysing a letter to Atticus (7.3 = 126 SB) in which Dicaearchus is referred to by name (sections 3.4 and 3.5). Here I argue that Cicero and Atticus had a genuine philosophical exchange as they interpreted, debated, and applied specific elements of Dicaearchus' argument for the supremacy of the active life when assessing Cicero's own conduct as he returned from the governorship of Cilicia on the eve of civil war in 50 BC. At this point we are in a position to identify the precise nature of Dicaearchus' influence on Cicero, which is the subject of the concluding section. In the

³ For discussion of Cicero's handling of the topic in these works, see, for instance, Müller (1965, 1968), Boyancé (1967), Bringmann (1971: 118–23), Büchner (1984: 69–74, 265), Dyck (1996: 199–203), Blöbner (2001). The question was a central concern in the works of Plato and Aristotle as well as the Hellenistic schools; for a general overview see Joly (1956). See also Bénatouil and Bonazzi (2012).

⁴ I discuss this in detail in section 3.2 below.

⁵ There are editions of testimonia by Wehrli (1967) and Mirhady (2001). To be sure, this passage is the only surviving evidence from antiquity overtly connecting Dicaearchus to the question of the best life.

3.1 A Peripatetic controversy

previous two chapters we have already seen Cicero draw heavily on the Platonic letters when exploring how philosophy might be applied in Roman politics. Here I argue that Cicero's vision of philosophy and its role in Roman political culture, as showcased in the preface to *De republica*, is appropriated in all fundamental respects from Dicaearchus.

3.1 A Peripatetic controversy

First, let us examine in more detail the philosophical nature of the *controversia* between Dicaearchus and Theophrastus over the best sort of life, reported by Cicero in *Epistulae ad Atticum* 2.16.3. Some scholars have been quick to make sweeping judgements on the basis of this passage. Frede, for example, writes of 'the famous dispute on the supremacy of the practical over the theoretical life between Theophrastus and Dicaearchus'.⁶ However, the letter to Atticus is in fact the only piece of evidence we possess from antiquity for the existence of such a disagreement between the two, let alone its fame. Indeed, we cannot say much with confidence except that Cicero considered Theophrastus and Dicaearchus, both Peripatetics (Cic. *Leg.* 3.14), to differ markedly in their position on the question 'is the *theōrētikos bios* or the *praktikos bios* the better?', a question broached in clear terms by Aristotle himself in the first books of both the *Nicomachean Ethics* (1.5, 1095b22–1096a5) and the *Eudemian Ethics* (1.5, 1216a27–9).⁷ Cicero's presentation of the *controversia* suggests that it was an internal controversy in the Peripatos, at least in the first generation of Aristotle's students.⁸

⁶ Frede (1989: 80); see also the comments of Brink (1940: 929), Regenbogen (1940: 1481–2), Wehrli (1967: 51), Moraux (1973: 411–12), Donini (1975: 345, 351–4), and Fortenbaugh (1984: 202–4).

⁷ The *controversia* concerns the question: in what does *eudaimonia* reside: activity in accordance with intellectual or practical virtue? It seems that Theophrastus and Dicaearchus came to different conclusions. Note that this question is a long recognised problem in Aristotelian ethics; see further Kenny (1992).

⁸ Theophrastus and Dicaearchus were contemporaries and both students of Aristotle (Cic. *Leg.* 3.14; Anon. *Vita Aristotelis Latina* 46–7). As an interesting anomaly, Dicaearchus is listed as a member of the Old Academy, as opposed to Aristotle, Theophrastus, and the Peripatetics, by Censorinus (*De die natali* 4.3).

Now, when Cicero reports the *controversia* he presents the conclusions but not the premisses of Theophrastus and Dicaearchus' arguments: we are told that they disagreed fundamentally, but we are not told why.⁹ In the following two sections I reconstruct the premisses of Theophrastus and Dicaearchus' respective arguments, highlight their Aristotelian pedigree, and identify the precise reasons for the *controversia*.

3.2 Theophrastus and Peripatetic orthodoxy

Let us take the case of Theophrastus first. We have no additional evidence for his stance from his own works, we cannot establish in which work he presented his argument,¹⁰ and we do not know how familiar Cicero was with his account.¹¹ In Cicero's *De finibus*,

⁹ In all likelihood the *controversia* arose from conflicting accounts of which life is the happiest in the works of Aristotle himself (contemplative: *EN* 10.7–9, 1177a12–1179b32; active: e.g., *Pol.* 7.3, 1325b14–33; 7.14, 1332b25–30; *EN* 1.2, 1094b7–10; 6.2, 1139b3–4; 6.5, 1140b7; 6.13, 1145a6–9). Ironically, a similar *controversia* about the nature of the best life still exists among Aristotle's 'students' today: scholars disagree about which life Aristotle himself ultimately favoured. There is a great deal of sophisticated scholarly debate over how Aristotle's remarks on the contemplative life in the tenth book of the *Nicomachean Ethics* can be reconciled with the rest of his ethics and political philosophy. There are many contentious issues, but three generally opposing camps exist. Some scholars argue that Aristotle cannot reconcile his conflicting views on contemplation and practical virtue because they are contradictory. They argue that Aristotle is an intellectualist who favours categorically θεωρία because it is the final or dominant end; see, for example, Nagel (1972), Cooper (1975: 144–80), Hardie (1980: 336–57), Heinaman (1988), and Kraut (1989). Some scholars argue that Aristotle can reconcile his conflicting views and present a more inclusive or comprehensive account of the good human life. Rorty (1978: 343), for example, argues that the two sorts of life 'not only perfect and enhance each other, but provide the conditions for one another's fullest development'. This 'compatibilist' account is pursued by Ackrill (1980) and Broadie (1991: 366–438); see also Kullmann (1995). Others reject Aristotle's advocacy of the contemplative life: Burger (1990) argues that Aristotle's vision of the godlike contemplative life is intentionally ironic because it is impossible for human beings to achieve; Nussbaum (1986: 373–7) marginalises the significance of Aristotle's thinking in the tenth book of the *Nicomachean Ethics*, claiming it represents 'a kind of ethical thought that Aristotle elsewhere vigorously attacks' (377); see also Moline (1983) and Schumacher (2000). According to these scholars, Aristotle thought that the active life is the best. The literature is immense, but see also Adkins (1978, 1984), Kenny (1978, 1992), Nannery (1981), Rowe (1990), Huber (1991), Dehart (1995), Peonidis (2001), and Sherman (2002). Extensive further bibliography can be found in Lockwood (2005: 85–9).

¹⁰ We have the titles of a number of candidate works, but the extant testimonia, collected in Fortenbaugh (1984), do not provide any further help.

¹¹ Cicero was reading Theophrastus' *On Ambition* in 60/59 BC (*Att.* 2.3.4 = 23 SB, 2.9.2 = 29 SB). Scholars have also suggested that Theophrastus discussed the issue in *De vita*

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however, while expounding a catalogue of Peripatetic writings and doctrines (5.9–14), the character Piso presents both Aristotle and Theophrastus as categorically favouring the leisured contemplative life (*vitae autem degendae ratio maxime illis quidem placuit quieta, in contemplatione et cognitione posita rerum*) for the same reason given in the tenth book of the *Nicomachean Ethics*, namely because it was most similar to the life led by the gods (*quia deorum vitae erat simillima*, 5.11; cf Arist. *EN* 1177b27–31, 1178b7–28, 1179a24–32).¹² The contemplative life described here is associated explicitly with rest (*quieta*) and theoretical reflection on and study of (*contemplatio et cognitio*) the true nature of things. Piso neatly portrays two aspects of the contemplative life: *cognitio* refers to the active acquiring of knowledge, investigation, study; *contemplatio* refers to reflection on knowledge already acquired. This interpretation of Aristotelian *theōria* goes beyond Aristotle's exposition in the *Nicomachean Ethics*, where in all likelihood *theōria* does not involve investigation (*cognitio*). Since Cicero associates Theophrastus with the *theōrētikos bios* involving *studia* and *quies* at *Epistulae ad Atticum* 2.16.3, we might speculate that this broader conception is a Theophrastan reworking of Aristotle; at any rate, by Cicero's time it appears reasonable to conceive of the contemplative life in this fashion.¹³

In *De finibus* Cicero reports that Aristotle and Theophrastus held a common view on the best life,¹⁴ justified by the same

beata or *De amicitia*, both of which Cicero seems to have known. It is sometimes maintained that Cicero got his information from a doxographical source or from the works of Dicaearchus; see further Huby (2001: 315–17).

¹² Aristotle also provides other reasons for why the contemplative life is best: Moline (1983: 40–1) identifies six separate arguments. Note that despite referring to ethical works of Theophrastus (*De beata vita*) and Aristotle (*teneamus Aristotelem et eius filium Nicomachum, cuius accurate scripti de moribus libri dicuntur illi quidem esse Aristoteli*) here (Cic. *Fin.* 5.12), it is uncertain whether Cicero read the (or a) *Nicomachean Ethics* himself; on Cicero's knowledge of Aristotle's ethical and political works, see further Barnes (1997: 44–50, 57–9). Scholars often claim that this Peripatetic catalogue is derived from Antiochus; Runia (1989: 33–4).

¹³ For further discussion of Theophrastus' views, see Bénatouïl (2012).

¹⁴ Note that Theophrastus is singled out for criticism for attributing special importance to fortune or luck, thereby implying that wisdom or virtue alone could not guarantee happiness (5.12; cf *Acad.* 1.33). For further commentary on the passage, see Fortenbaugh (1983a: 214–16) and (1984: 202); also Nussbaum (1986: 318–42). Note that

argument, which, judging by its exposition in the tenth book of the *Nicomachean Ethics*, relies ultimately on Aristotle's account of the soul: the godlike contemplative life befits νοῦς, which is the divine, most excellent, part of a human being's nature (EN 1177a12–18, 1177b26–1178a8, 1178a16–22).¹⁵ Cicero's account is brought into question, however, by a report at the very beginning of the first book of *De placitis philosophorum*, a strange work that was transmitted in the corpus of Plutarch's *Moralia* but is generally thought spurious. Some scholars, most notably Diels, have considered it to be an abridgement of an earlier work by the Peripatetic philosopher Aëtius of Antioch,¹⁶ who was perhaps active in the second or first century BC.¹⁷ When reporting how various schools have divided philosophy, (pseudo-)Plutarch writes:

Ἀριστοτέλης δὲ καὶ Θεόφραστος καὶ σχεδὸν πάντες οἱ Περιπατητικοὶ διέλιπον τὴν φιλοσοφίαν οὕτως· ἀναγκαῖον τὸν τέλειον ἄνδρα καὶ θεωρητικὸν εἶναι τῶν ὄντων καὶ πρακτικὸν τῶν δεόντων. ((pseudo-)Plutarch, *De placitis philosophorum* 874f1–4)

Aristotle and Theophrastus and more or less all the Peripatetics divide philosophy in this way: it is necessary for the complete man to be both a contemplator of things that are true and a doer of what is necessary.

(Pseudo-)Plutarch then elaborates on this claim regarding the complete (τέλειος) man; but he does not succeed in explaining the reasons why it is necessary for him to be like this, why Aristotle, Theophrastus, and more or less all the Peripatetics defined him in this way. He asserts that some questions, such as 'Is the world infinite?', require contemplation and the theoretical intellect, and are posited merely for the sake of knowing the answer (874f5–875a1); whereas others, such as 'What are the

Cicero often conjoins the views of Theophrastus with Aristotle (e.g., *DND* 1.33–5, *Fin.* 1.6, 4.3, 5.73, *Orat.* 172, 192–4, 218, 228). This appears to be largely a product of how his sources presented the Peripatetic tradition; see Runia (1989).

¹⁵ Cooper (1975: 175–7) notes that this agrees with Aristotle's account of the soul in *De anima* (cf e.g., 2.1, 412b5–9; 2.2, 413b25–32; 3.4, 429b25–7), in which 'we have not one soul with many capacities, but two souls, one the actuality of a body and the other not'. See also Whiting (1986).

¹⁶ For exhaustive discussion of Diel's hypothesis, see Mansfeld and Runia (1996).

¹⁷ Our biographical information on Aëtius is very sketchy; see Mansfeld (2002) and Mansfeld and Runia (1996) with further references.

best methods to educate children?', are posited 'for the sake of action' (ἐνεκα τοῦ πράξει, 875a1–4). The 'contemplative man' (θεωρητικός, 874f6) is skilled at the first sort of question, 'the practical man' (πρακτικός ἀνὴρ, 875a4) is skilled at the second; but the complete (τέλειος) man is skilled at both. This account is striking, because it suggests that Aristotle and Theophrastus did indeed hold a common view on the best sort of life, but that it was a compromise or a union of the two options: the best life should involve both contemplation and practical action. This would be a much more inclusive or comprehensive account of the best life than we see in the tenth book of the *Nicomachean Ethics*; but we are not provided with a detailed argument for why they held this view. (Pseudo-)Plutarch's report of the dual-faceted best life led by the complete man does, however, recall Aristotle's account of the best life in the *Eudemean Ethics*; and here we do find an explicit argument.

In the second book of the *Eudemean Ethics* Aristotle defines *eudaimonia*, itself τελεία (1219a36), as 'the activity of a complete life in accordance with complete virtue' (εἶη ἂν ἡ εὐδαιμονία ζωῆς τελείας ἐνέργεια κατ' ἀρετὴν τελείαν, 1219a38–9), which is apparently equivalent to 'the activity of a good soul' (ἐστὶν ἄρα ἡ εὐδαιμονία ψυχῆς ἀγαθῆς ἐνέργεια, 1219a34–5).¹⁸ Indeed, this view of *eudaimonia* is premised on a particular account of the soul that appears in this work (1219b26–1220a4): the dual-faceted complete, best life is premised on the integrated dual nature of human beings. In the *Eudemean Ethics* Aristotle maintains that the one soul has two key aspects (δύο μέρη ψυχῆς, 1219b28) of special significance for a human life. He then highlights in particular the rational parts (τὰ λόγου μετέχοντα, 1219b28), which are responsible for, on the one hand, λογισμός ('reasoning') and, on the other, ὄρεξις ('desire') and παθήματα ('the emotions'), which themselves are 'ruled' by reason (1220a1–2). Aristotle then asserts that there are virtues corresponding to these two parts

¹⁸ For detailed discussion of Aristotle's view of the best life in the *Eudemean Ethics*, see Cooper (1975: 115–39), Kenny (1978: 161–214; 1992), and Ackrill (1980). It is significantly different from that in the tenth book of the *Nicomachean Ethics*. Much of the scholarly debate concerns Aristotle's conflicting accounts of *eudaimonia*.

(ἀρετῆς δ' εἶδη δύο), 'intellectual' (διανοητική) and 'moral' (ἠθική) (1220a5–12). Although not made entirely clear, it seems as though the intellectual virtues pertain to the theoretical intellect, whereas the moral virtues pertain to the passions and the practical intellect.¹⁹ Returning to the question of the best life, privileging either aspect of the unified soul at the expense of the other obviously leads to an incomplete or imbalanced (ἀτελής) human life (1219a35–7); thus, *eudaimonia* consists in both the moral and the intellectual virtues together, unified, in harmony.²⁰ We can now appreciate that (pseudo-)Plutarch's account is most likely a report of Aristotle's view of the best life in the *Eudemean Ethics*, perhaps gathered from the work of Aëtius.

To be sure, (pseudo-)Plutarch's account also agrees to a lesser extent with certain aspects of the contemplative life in the tenth book of the *Nicomachean Ethics*. There Aristotle does not reject or exclude completely practical virtue from a good human life. Without question, he makes the life of practical action secondary in value to the divine contemplative life – he makes it *eudaimonia* in a secondary way (δευτέρως) (1178a9–10; cf 1178b33–5) – and insists that there are limits on the pursuit of practical virtue (1178a10–b8, 1178b33–1179a9); but he also clearly admits the value and importance of practical action or practical virtue in *a human life* (as opposed to the life of a deity), because of human beings' composite (σύνθετος) nature (1178a19–23; cf 1178a10).²¹ On this evidence we can posit that it is a reasonable and not uncommon ancient view that Aristotle, Theophrastus, and more or less all the Peripatetics agreed in advocating some kind of composite between the two sorts of life.²²

¹⁹ See Cooper (1975: 117–18).

²⁰ The exact ratio of the harmony or combination is more problematic, since Aristotle states that the reasoning aspect of the soul has hegemony over the desirous aspect (*EE* 2.2, 1220a1–2; cf Cic. *Fin.* 5.58). What is important, however, is that due value or respect is given to both sorts of virtue – there is no dominant virtue as in the model of the tenth book of the *Nicomachean Ethics*.

²¹ For detailed discussion of the value of practical virtue and its place in a fulfilled human life, see, in addition to the works noted above, Scott (1999) and Whiting (1986).

²² On Peripatetic preferences for the life σύνθετον ἐξ ἀμφοῖν, see also Stobaeus 2.144.18–23 Wachsmuth.

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Thus, in later sources we have two competing accounts of Aristotle's and Theophrastus' position with regard to the best life. One tradition is based apparently on the tenth book of the *Nicomachean Ethics* or some similar work (Cic. *Fin.* 5.12) and a view of the soul that appears in *De anima*, the other apparently on the account of the best life and the soul in the *Eudemian Ethics*. It is difficult to attribute to one account priority over the other,²³ but in *De finibus* and his letters (*Att.* 2.16.3) Cicero associates both Aristotle and Theophrastus – or just Theophrastus when Aristotle is not mentioned – with the more intellectual life.²⁴ Cicero does not mention Aristotle or Theophrastus with respect to a dual-faceted best life, even when presenting very similar views in the fifth book of *De finibus* (5.58; cf 5.46–64);²⁵ nor does a dual-faceted best life obviously fit the structure or logic of the controversy reported to us in *Epistulae ad Atticum* 2.16.3.²⁶

At this point we cannot do much more with Theophrastus. However, the account just given has some important implications for our understanding of the disagreement. It makes Dicaearchus the protagonist of the *controversia*: he is reacting to or dissenting from the Peripatetic orthodoxy shared by Aristotle and Theophrastus.²⁷ Indeed, the passage from (pseudo-)Plutarch

²³ There is some dispute over the relative date of composition of the *Eudemian Ethics* and the *Nicomachean Ethics*; see further Jaeger (1948: 228–58) and Kenny (1978: 215–39).

²⁴ It is uncertain whether Cicero knew directly of the *Eudemian Ethics*; Kenny (1978: 15–17) considers some inconclusive evidence.

²⁵ The Antiochean account of the best life blurs the distinction between *theōria* and *praxis* by making contemplation the highest form of action; see further Müller (1968) and Barnes (1989: 86–9). It is also predicated on an integrated dual-faceted account of human nature (*Fin.* 5.34–45).

²⁶ To be sure, the structure of the *controversia* does not necessarily imply that Theophrastus rejected outright the value or importance of practical virtue. We can accept that Theophrastus, following Aristotle, privileged the contemplative life, for the reason that it was godlike and serviced the nobler, more excellent element of human nature. That would be in keeping with Aristotle's argument in the tenth book of the *Nicomachean Ethics*, and it would agree with what Cicero records in *De finibus*. But there is no need to insist that he held a blunt position on the issue. It would be consistent to maintain that he also admitted the pursuit of the life of practical action, so long as it was undertaken properly within certain limits, for instance that it was not motivated by excessive ambition or other vices (cf Cic. *Att.* 2.9.2 = 29 SB), and did not lead to or involve the neglect of contemplation (cf Arist. *EN* 10.8, 1178b3–8). This more inclusive, but still hierarchical, view would also be consistent with Cicero's presentation of the *controversia*.

²⁷ Note that the grammar of *tanta controversia est Dicaearcho ... cum Theophrasto* at 2.16.3 seems to imply that Dicaearchus criticised the views expressed by Theophrastus.

is also indicative of some disparity among the Peripatetics (σχεδὸν πάντες) over the nature of the best life,²⁸ and Dicaearchus immediately comes to mind as a dissenting voice: the position attributed to him by Cicero, that he prefers the life of practical action ‘by far over all others’ (*longe omnibus*), is an alternative to either of the two views we have seen attributed to Aristotle and Theophrastus (the intellectual and the dual-faceted modes of life).

3.3 Dicaearchus’ argument

Unfortunately, in reconstructing Dicaearchus’ argument for the supremacy of the active life we are once more hampered by the nature of our evidence. We do not know for certain where he presented his position, nor do we know how Cicero came to know of it. It is clear, however, that Cicero and his contemporaries – most conservatively, at least Philodemus (e.g., *De musica* col. 49.21 Delattre, *De Stoicis* fr. 15 Dorandi, *Ind. Acad.* col. 2.5 Dorandi), Varro (*RR* 1.2.16, 2.1.3), and Atticus (Cic. *Att.* 2.2.2 = 22 SB, 2.12.4 = 30 SB, 2.16.3 = 36 SB, 6.2.3 = 116 SB, 7.3.1 = 126 SB, 13.30.2 = 303 SB, 13.31.2 = 302 SB) – had access to a considerable number of Dicaearchus’ works that were of general ethical and political interest. Around the time of *Epistulae ad Atticum* 2.16.3 Cicero was reading some of them (*hercule magnum acervum Dicaearchi mihi ante pedes exstruxeram*, *Att.* 2.2.2).²⁹ We can see from 2.2.2 that Dicaearchus’ constitutions of various Greek city-states were in

²⁸ Indeed, the Peripatetic school appears to have been particularly open and accommodating to internal debate about ethical topics. Take pleasure as another example. It seems that some Peripatetics, such as Lyco of Troas and Hieronymus of Rhodes (both third century BC), advocated a central place for pleasure in the good life (Clem. Alex. *Strom.* 2.21.129.24–9). Hieronymus apparently made the absence of pain the *summum bonum* (Cic. *Fin.* 5.14), and Diodorus of Tyre (late second century BC) combined with virtue the absence of pain in his account of the highest good (Cic. *Fin.* 5.14). In contrast, Critolaus (c.200–c.118 BC), Diodorus’ teacher and predecessor as scholarch of the Peripatetic school, maintained that pleasure is an evil (Gell. *NA* 9.5.6). In Cicero’s *De finibus* (5.14) the spokesman Piso even questions whether some of these philosophers (Diodorus and Hieronymus) deserve the label ‘Peripatetic’ at all, since they deviate so much from the ‘orthodox’ position.

²⁹ At *De officiis* 2.16 Cicero refers to Dicaearchus as a voluminous Peripatetic.

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circulation,³⁰ as were his works on topography or geography,³¹ which might have had political significance.³² Certain works of social and political history (*Att.* 6.2.3), a political dialogue (*Att.* 13.30.2), a letter to Aristoxenus (*Att.* 13.32.2 = 305 SB), and what we might call works of anthropology and cultural history (Varro, *RR* 1.2.16, 2.1.3),³³ were also apparently accessible in the first century BC. Some of his works on the soul were available (*Att.* 13.32.2, 13.33.2 = 309 SB); Cicero names *The Descent* and *On the Soul*.³⁴

Despite all these works of social and political interest, it is not clear to what extent they involved discussion of questions of political philosophy and ethics. Dicaearchus is, however, credited by a much later Byzantine source with formulating a theory of the mixed constitution (Photius, *Bibliotheca* 37), which would be a very significant development in the history of the Peripatos.³⁵ Scholars claim frequently that his work *Tripoliticus*, of which Cicero was aware in 45 BC (*Att.* 13.32.2) and which seems to have contained an account of or comments on the Spartan constitution (Athen. *Deip.* 4.141a–c), developed this theory.³⁶ Perhaps surprisingly then, Cicero makes no mention of Dicaearchus by

³⁰ In 2.2.2 Cicero refers to having his Κορινθίων and Ἀθηναίων elsewhere. Huby (2001: 324–7) argues that the *Constitution of the Athenians*, attributed to Aristotle, could in fact be by Dicaearchus.

³¹ Dicaearchus wrote a number of geographical works; for discussion, see Keyser (2001). Owing to the reference to Procilius (*Att.* 2.2.2), a Roman writer of topographical works, it seems that Cicero was reading topographical or geographical works of Dicaearchus. Indeed, Cicero himself was researching for a proposed work *De geographia* at this time (2.4.1, 3 = 24 SB; 2.6.1 = 26 SB; 2.7.1 = 27 SB).

³² The elder Pliny (*NH* 2.162) records that Dicaearchus measured the height of mountains under the patronage of kings.

³³ We possess a number of titles of these works (1 Mirhady). Ax (2001) argues that Dicaearchus' *Life of Greece* served as a model or source for Varro's *De vita populi Romani*. For discussion of the nature and influence of these works, see Saunders (2001), Schütrumpf (2001), and White (2001) with further references.

³⁴ Dicaearchus' views on the soul appear to have been very influential. There is considerable discussion or mention of his views in later philosophical works on the soul and divination, including Cicero's *Tusculans* (13–32 Mirhady). For further discussion, see Caston (2001) and Sharples (2001) with extensive further bibliography.

³⁵ See further Fotiou (1981).

³⁶ See Fotiou (1981: 534 n. 4) for a detailed catalogue of distinguished nineteenth- and twentieth-century scholars who accept this. Most recently, Rowe (2000: 394–5) and Huby (2001: 327) reiterate the point. However, it seems to me that the evidence for accepting this is rather thin.

name in his *De republica*.³⁷ He does, however, name Dicaearchus or use him as source material in various philosophical works, particularly the *Tusculans* (*Tusc.* 1.21, 1.24, 1.41, 1.51, 1.77, 4.71, *Div.* 1.5, 1.113, 2.100, 2.105, *Leg.* 3.14, *Acad.* 2.124, *Fin.* 4.79, *Off.* 2.16–17).

Dicaearchus appears, therefore, to have been a major and influential philosophical figure in the first century BC, and we can presume that a number of educated Romans had a very detailed knowledge of his philosophical position and arguments. We, on the other hand, are in an impoverished position. We do, however, have an important clue from our investigation thus far: differing accounts of the soul appear to be at the root of the differing positions on the question of the best life in the works of Aristotle himself. Thus, in attempting to reconstruct Dicaearchus' argument, it might initially appear that a good starting point is a consideration of his views on the soul. However, such an approach has proved ineffective.

Several scholars have suggested that Dicaearchus' views on the supremacy of the practical life relate closely to his views on the soul; but they have failed to offer a compelling explanation for this being the case or why this led to the disagreement with Theophrastus.³⁸ Unquestionably, Dicaearchus agreed with Aristotle on most major points concerning the soul.³⁹ For example, like Aristotle he maintained that the soul is mortal (*Cic. Tusc.* 1.77; ps.-Galen, *De hist. phil.* 24; Lact. *Inst. Div.* 7.13.7) and that it has a divine nature (ps.-Galen, *De hist. phil.* 105; ps.-Plut. *De plac. phil.* 904e). Theophrastus also appears to have more or less accepted Aristotle's account of the soul

³⁷ Solmsen (1933) argues that Cicero's account of the mixed constitution in *De republica* is in fact based on Dicaearchus. Cicero's comments in *De legibus* 3.14 and *De divinatione* 2.1 suggest that Dicaearchus was a source and that he wrote important works on political philosophy, but Smethurst (1952) finds the evidence for his influence on the *De republica* inconclusive. This may be so with respect to the mixed constitution. In sections 3.4 and 3.6 below I highlight some strong parallels between Dicaearchus' argument for the supremacy of the active life and Cicero's advocacy of the political life in *De republica*.

³⁸ See, for example, Wehrli (1967: 50), Donini (1975: 352), Fortenbaugh (1984: 202–4), and Sharples (2001: 154).

³⁹ On the relationship between Aristotle and Dicaearchus' views on the soul, see in particular Sharples (2001: 152–63) with further bibliography.

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(Simpl. *In Arist. phys.* 964.29–965.6 Diels).⁴⁰ On the basis of what we have seen already, given Dicaearchus' acknowledgement of the soul's divine nature in particular, we might expect him to advocate that the divine, godlike contemplative life of the *Nicomachean Ethics* (or at least the compromise of the *Eudemean Ethics*) is best. His failure to do so, and a lack of evidence for a significantly different view of the soul, hint that his views on the soul do not form the key premisses for his differing position on the best life.

A compelling approach now, it seems to me, is to focus on the evidence we possess for Dicaearchus' views on practical ethics and political philosophy. Although it is very scanty, we can discern some general attitudes. For a start, Dicaearchus appears particularly interested in human beings' social nature and how they best live together in a political community. His authorship of works of cultural history and the constitutions of various city-states itself is indicative of this. A more developed example appears in Plutarch's *Table Talk*, where he reports that Dicaearchus thought it important to foster the goodwill of everyone towards oneself, but to make only good men one's friends (659f2–660a1). Dicaearchus argues that genuine friendship takes time and is gained through virtue (δὲ ἀρετῆς, 660a1–2), but goodwill arises through positive social interactions of all sorts with one's fellow citizens, where one is benevolent and shares favours (660a1–4). Such sentiments are indicative of an interest in the practical and civic life of the individual, and in the positive functioning of the city as a whole (cf Cic. *Att.* 2.12.4 = 30 SB, *Off.* 2.16–17; Stephanus Byzantius, *Ethnica* 511.17–512.13 Meineke) – but what of Dicaearchus' philosophical arguments for the supremacy of the life of practical action?

3.3.1 Codex Vaticanus 435

The most important piece of evidence comes from an enigmatic source. While working on a manuscript of Synesius in the Vatican

⁴⁰ See Fortenbaugh (1984: 203).

library, von Arnim discovered an interposed leaf of text with the title Πλουτάρχ<χου ἤ> Κεκιλίου ἀποφθέγματα Ῥωμαϊκά ('Plutarch or Caecilius' *Roman Sayings*'), a work addressed to a certain Sebosus (435.1).⁴¹ It is not certain when the text was composed or who the author is.⁴² From what we can tell, the author – whom for convenience I shall call Plutarch/Caecilius – is addressing the question 'Who were wiser, the ancient Greeks or the ancient Romans?' The text praises the honest practical virtues of the ancient Romans (οἱ παλαιοὶ Ῥωμαίων) in contrast with the clever sayings of the ancient Greeks, epitomised in the apothegms that are usually attributed to the seven wise men (435.1–8). In this context of evaluating the nature of (ancient) wisdom, there is an appeal made to the views of Dicaearchus:

Δικαιάρχῳ δὲ οὐδὲ ταῦτα σοφῶν εἶναι ἀνδρῶν δοκεῖ, μὴ γὰρ δὴ γε τοὺς πάλοι λόγῳ φιλοσοφεῖν. ἀλλ' εἶναι τὴν σοφίαν τότε γούιν ἐπιτήδευσιν ἔργων καλῶν, χρόνῳ δὲ λόγων ὀχλικῶν γενέσθαι τέχνην. καὶ νῦν μὲν τὸν πιθανῶς διαλεχθέντα μέγαν εἶναι δοκεῖν φιλόσοφον, ἐν δὲ τοῖς πάλοι χρόνοις ὁ ἀγαθὸς μόνος ἦν φιλόσοφος, εἰ καὶ μὴ περιβλέπτους καὶ ὀχλικούς ἀσκοῖτο λόγους. οὐ γὰρ ἐξήτουν ἑκείνοι γε εἰ πολιτευτέον οὐδὲ πῶς, ἀλλ' ἐπολιτεύοντο αὐτοὶ καλῶς, οὐδὲ εἰ χρῆ γαμεῖν, ἀλλὰ γήμαντες ὃν δεῖ τρόπον γαμεῖν ταῖς γυναιξὶ συνεβίωιν. ταῦτα ἦν, φησὶν, ἔργα ἀνδρῶν καὶ ἐπιτηδεύματα σοφῶν, αἱ δὲ ἀποφθέγξεις αὐταὶ πρᾶγμα φορτικόν. (*Codex Vaticanus* 435.9–19, 119–122 von Arnim)

But Dicaearchus did not consider these [sayings] to be of wise men, for he thought that the ancients did not do philosophy with speech.⁴³ Rather he considered wisdom, then at any rate, to be the practice of good deeds, whereas the craft of

⁴¹ For detailed discussion of the nature and discovery of this piece of evidence, see von Arnim (1892). The line references follow Mirhady (2001: 34).

⁴² Given the reported authorship, a reasonable conjecture is the first or second century AD; see further White (2001: 205 n. 29).

⁴³ There is some uncertainty regarding how one should render *logos* here. I have translated it 'speech' and I think it is that strong. My translation differs from White (2001: 208–10), who thinks it means robust, systematic reasoning or argumentation. It also differs from Boys-Stones (2001: 16), who offers: 'for he thought that the ancients did not engage in verbal philosophy'. It accords with Mirhady (2001: 35), who offers: 'since the ancients did not do philosophy with speech'. Clearly some preliminary justification for my reading of *logos* is warranted. To be sure, it looks at first blush as though there is a contrast with *erga* in the following line and an important distinction being made: either (1) between doing philosophy merely with words, in the sense of theorising or stating what is good but not acting on it in practice, and doing philosophy in words *and* in deed; or (2) between doing theoretical philosophy and simply 'getting on with it' in what we might call a 'pre-philosophical' manner. I have translated *logos* as 'speech' since it

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popular speeches arose over time; and he thought that now the man conversing persuasively is considered to be a great philosopher, but in the ancient times the good man alone was a philosopher, even if he did not create admired and popular speeches. For those men at least did not enquire whether they should practise politics or how, but they themselves did practise politics finely; nor did they enquire if one should marry, but having married in the manner which they ought to marry, they lived together with their wives. These, he said, were the deeds and practices of wise men, but these sayings are a vulgar matter.

This passage raises a number of interpretative issues. Two are of vital importance for our project: (1) on what is the Dicaearchan material focused? I shall argue that the Dicaearchan material in this passage is concerned specifically with the question of the best life. (2) Where does this account of Dicaearchus' views come from? I shall argue that it is derived from an account of golden age men and their decline. Once we have justified these claims, we can proceed to reconstruct Dicaearchus' argument.

There are a number of reasons for thinking that the content of this passage refers to the debate over the best mode of life. First, the manner in which the material is presented is in keeping with other doxographical accounts of various philosophers' views on the topic, evident particularly in Stobaeus (2.41.9–11, 2.44.26–45.2, 2.94.8–20, 2.109.10–20, 2.143.24–144.15 Wachsmuth) and Diogenes Laertius (3.78, 5.31, 6.11, 6.72, 7.121, 10.119).⁴⁴ From such evidence we can discern that questions such as 'Should the wise man practise politics?' and 'Should the wise man marry?' were standard points of debate or reference when considering the issue, and that they were frequently presented conjoined or in sequence (cf also Cic. *Fin.* 3.68).⁴⁵ The manner in which the *topoi* of marriage and practising politics are presented in this

seems to me that Dicaearchus is making a stronger claim than either (1) or (2): not only do these ancient men genuinely do philosophy by practising good deeds, they do not talk about the good at all – they do philosophy *only* in deed since words are not needed when it comes to doing philosophy. I argue in more detail for this reading in [section 3.3.2](#) below.

⁴⁴ I am indebted to Malcolm Schofield for making me aware of this point. The following discussion is premised on his argument in Schofield (1991: 119–27).

⁴⁵ Schofield (1991: 123) suggests that they are part of a 'check-list'. He also notes (120 n. 3) that such questions were standard θέσεις in the rhetorical handbooks; for examples, see Spengel (1855: 2.50–3, 2.123–5). On the basis of *De finibus* 3.68, it seems probable that by Cicero's time this presentation of the debate was already standardised.

passage fits this pattern of discussion of the question. Moreover, it is apparent that the views of many major figures in the tradition on this subject were packaged, often with inaccuracies and mistakes, in this framework.⁴⁶ Stobaeus refers to the views of Philo, Eudorus, Aristotle, and Arius Didymus; Diogenes Laertius to Plato, Aristotle, Antisthenes, Diogenes the Cynic, the Stoics Zeno and Chrysippus, and Epicurus in this format. It is quite possible that Dicaearchus suffered the same fate. Indeed, given the likely date and authorship of the *Codex Vaticanus*, this is a natural and compelling explanation for the presence and presentation of such *topoi* here; and it may even suggest Plutarch/Caecilius' own concern with the question of the best life in the passage from the *Codex Vaticanus*. An alternative explanation is that the author took this evidence from a doxographical source concerned with the issue of the best life, who had already packaged the Dicaearchan material in this manner. Indeed, we cannot be sure whether Dicaearchus himself composed with these pressures in mind, or whether later authors and thinkers realised the application of his views to the debate and presented them in that formulaic way. But the presentation of the Dicaearchan material in this passage strongly suggests that it was directed at this question.

Second, it is clear that Dicaearchus himself wrote a number of books *On Lives* (περὶ βίων) (DL 3.4). Huby and White interpret these as works of philosophical biography, accounts or illustrations of the lives of various philosophers, in particular the seven sages (DL 1.40–1), Pythagoras (Porphyry, *Vita Pyth.* 18–19, 56–7), Socrates (Plut. *An seni* 796d–e), and Plato (DL 3.4).⁴⁷ These books are, however, likely to concern specifically the *ethical* topic of the modes of living, the nature of the best life. Epicurus and Chrysippus focused on this ethical topic in their treatises of the

⁴⁶ Schofield (1991: 123–7) argues that this doxographical process was Stoic in its origin and inspiration.

⁴⁷ Huby (2001: 321–4) and White (2001: 198–236). These biographical comments made by Dicaearchus may derive from a wide range of sources since a title is only provided in the case of Diogenes Laertius 3.4. In particular, much of the evidence cited can be ascribed plausibly to the *Life of Greece* instead; in that work Dicaearchus was also prone to include biographical data on notable individuals.

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same name (DL 7.121, 10.28; Plut. *Stoic. rep.* 1033d, 1043b). Philo and Eudorus likewise had sections on βίοι, which were concerned with the issue (Stob. 2.41.7–8, 2.44.26–45.2 Wachsmuth). Aristotle similarly considers βίοι in an ethical framework, in terms of competing ends (τέλη) (*EN* 1.5, 1095b14–1096a10; *EE* 1.5, 1215b15–1216a36). Given the parallel, Dicaearchus would have focused specifically on the question of the best life, in particular the competing claims between different sorts of life, even if he used specific historical exemplars, such as the seven sages, to illustrate the argument. Such a work would seem a natural candidate for the material we see in the *Codex Vaticanus*.

White, however, argues that Dicaearchus was in fact concerned in his works *On Lives* to show how the pursuit of wisdom and the philosophical life had developed over time via historical exemplars of the lives of famous philosophers.⁴⁸ He does not think Dicaearchus had a polemical aim in the work nor that he was interested in enshrining the superiority of the active life;⁴⁹ rather, White thinks that Dicaearchus' interest was more cultural than ethical. He concludes that Dicaearchus constructed a developmental story that demonstrated how certain epochal figures 'transformed prevailing conceptions of wisdom and enriched the intellectual and educational resources of Greek culture'.⁵⁰ On this reading, Dicaearchus' concern is not so much with arguing for a strong thesis with respect to the best life, but rather for accounting for the evolution of philosophy and changing cultural conceptions of wisdom.

White's treatment of a disparate range of evidence is thorough and his case is well argued. Indeed, a notion of development is clearly at play in this passage (although its significance, I shall argue, is ethical). But this interesting interpretation does not detract from the fact that in the *Codex Vaticanus* passage the

⁴⁸ White (2001).

⁴⁹ Compare Jaeger (1960a), who argues that Dicaearchus composed a historical survey of philosophers pursuing the political life in order to demonstrate the superiority of the active life *contra* Aristotle and Theophrastus. White (2001: 196–7, 228–36) offers compelling objections to this view.

⁵⁰ White (2001: 236).

Dicaearchan material is presented in a manner that suggests its relevance to the question of the best life. The doxographical fingerprints are obvious.⁵¹ Of course, it may be true that Dicaearchus himself is not responsible for this and that some later source integrated him into the debate. We need not concern ourselves too much about this now; we can suspend judgement owing to a lack of decisive evidence.

It seems, then, that the material in this passage is pertinent to the debate surrounding the best life. We can move on to the next question: is Dicaearchus really concerned with ‘golden age’ men here? At first glance, that would seem a major jump from the interests of Plutarch/Caecilius, whose concern is with the wisdom of the ancient Greeks and Romans, people very much in relatively recent history. Huby and White concur and think that the Dicaearchan material in this passage is concerned specifically with the seven wise men.⁵² Their case appeals to Dicaearchus’ apparent focus on the category of the σοφοί in this passage and his interest in this topic elsewhere (DL 1.40–1). This is convincing to a point. To be sure, the sayings discussed in the *Codex Vaticanus* before the cited passage (435.1–8) are mostly associated with the seven wise men.⁵³ Furthermore, in his catalogue of the wise men Dicaearchus favours those ancient sages who excelled in practical action rather than speculation (DL 1.41), and we can see this sort of idea in the cited passage.⁵⁴ But their case ultimately fails to convince.

For a start, the fact that Plutarch/Caecilius is interested in the wisdom of the Greek sages does not necessarily imply that the Dicaearchan material in the cited passage specifically concerns this same topic. Indeed, we can ascertain with some degree of certainty that it does not. Let us consider the form of the argument concerning the σοφοί. In the first instance, before the Dicaearchan material in the quoted passage, the term σοφοί clearly refers specifically to the Greek wise men behind certain gnomic sayings

⁵¹ White (2001: 205–9) neglects this in his interpretation of the passage.

⁵² Huby (2001: 321–4) and White (2001: 205–9). ⁵³ See further Snell (1971).

⁵⁴ See White (2001: 204–5). It is evident from Diogenes Laertius (1.40–2) that there was great debate in the fourth century BC over who qualified for the catalogue, and perhaps Dicaearchus used excellence in practical affairs as a criterion.

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(435.1–8), of whom there are traditionally seven. Then we have the Dicaearchan material, and then we have mention of σοφοί again (435.18). It is unclear to whom this now refers. The author wants the Dicaearchan material to support the conclusion that the wise man is a man of action, not of gnomic sayings, thereby excluding these few early Greeks from being truly wise, and in fact making the ancient Romans the wise men (435.19–26). But Dicaearchus has not explicitly made a claim about σοφοί *qua* a select group of a few wise men, at least not in the material given. Dicaearchus' argument has been made in general terms: he talks about ancient men in general (ἐκείνοι) and ancient wisdom in general. It seems that the author has used the material to secure the conclusion that the ancient Romans were wise men via a comparison with this generalised Dicaearchan account of ancient men. This is different from claiming that certain people were wise men, as in the case of the Greek sages. Indeed, Dicaearchus is not concerned with specific particular individuals here: the Dicaearchan material is intended to make an ethical point concerning ancient humankind *as a whole*.

It is my thesis that these ancient men are those of the golden age. We can understand this by analysing the vocabulary of time in the cited passage. There are three crucial instances: 'the ancients' (τοὺς πάλαι, 435.10), 'then' (τότε, 435.10), 'in ancient times' (ἐν τοῖς πάλαι χρόνοις, 435.13). White thinks that they are 'indifferent' in their scope and probably refer to the archaic period,⁵⁵ the period of the gnomic sayings traditionally attributed to the wise men, and the time of the ancient Romans, to whom Plutarch/Caecilius wishes to compare Dicaearchus' picture. But clearly Dicaearchus himself was not talking about the ancient Romans. And the generalised language in the passage would not seem to be referring to seven sages or a limited group of wise men either.

When we compare the vocabulary of time with Porphyry's account of Dicaearchus' description of the golden age, we can appreciate that such terms refer specifically to this period. A number of sources indicate that in his *Life of Greece*

⁵⁵ White (2001: 207–8).

Dicaearchus offered a historical account of human nature and development clearly modelled on the mythological account of the five ages (Varro, *RR* 2.1.3; Porphyry, *De abs.* 4.2.1–9; Jerome, *Adv. Iov.* 2.13), familiar from Hesiod (*WD* 109–201).⁵⁶ Porphyry provides the most detailed account.⁵⁷ He reports that Dicaearchus, when discussing the ‘early life’ (ἀρχαῖος βίος) of the Greeks, said that ‘the ancients’ (οἱ παλαιοί) were the golden race (4.2.1), living a life closest to that of the gods in the golden age of effortless bounty under Cronus (4.2.1–3). He concludes Dicaearchus’ account as follows: ταυτὶ μὲν Δικαιάρχου τὰ παλαιὰ Ἑλληνικῶν διεξιόντος μακάριόν τε τὸν βίον ἀφηγουμένου τῶν παλαιωτάτων (‘This is what is said when Dicaearchus describes the ancient affairs of the Greeks and relates as blessed the life of the most ancient men’, 4.2.9). Admittedly there is some discrepancy in Porphyry’s vocabulary: he uses the superlative παλαιωτάτων as well as παλαιούς to refer to the same golden age men. We need not place too much significance on this. If we attribute the same meaning to πάλα(-) terms in the cited passage from the *Codex Vaticanus*, we can assert confidently that the Dicaearchan material there concerns golden age man.

Thus, I see the Dicaearchan material in the cited passage as part of an ethical discussion of the best mode of life. It seems as if the material has been taken from a narrative concerning the golden age of humankind and its decline, which we know for certain Dicaearchus described in his *Life of Greece* (Varro, *RR* 2.1.3; Porphyry, *De abs.* 4.2.1–9; Jerome, *Adv. Iov.* 2.13).⁵⁸ Indeed,

⁵⁶ There is useful discussion of Dicaearchus’ views on the golden age in Boys-Stones (2001: 14–17).

⁵⁷ Saunders (2001) provides a detailed discussion of a number of problems and confusing issues arising in this text, in particular how certain comments relate to Peripatetic orthodoxy and the extent to which Porphyry is reproducing a Hesiodic rather than a Dicaearchan account. There is also discussion of Porphyry’s use of sources in Bouffartigue and Patillon (1977: xxv–xxxvii). Such concerns do not significantly affect my reconstruction of Dicaearchus’ argument.

⁵⁸ That Dicaearchus should adopt this tactic is not surprising, for there are other examples of philosophers (including contemporaries of Dicaearchus) using such a golden age scenario or imagery in order to make ethical points: for example, Plato (e.g., *Polit.* 269c–274d, *Laws* 676a–679e), the Cynics (Dio Chrysostom, *Oration* 6.21–9), and the Stoics (e.g., Sen. *Ep.* 90). Boys-Stones (2001: 3–59) provides an excellent critical discussion of this subject and lists further bibliography. There are also some tantalising

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we also know from these accounts that Dicaearchus was prepared to go back to the golden age, a sort of 'original position', in his developmental account of human culture in the *Life of Greece*. We have every reason to suspect a similar move in a developmental account of wisdom and philosophy, if we follow White's explanation of *περὶ βίωων*, and in an ethical study of modes of life that was based on a developmental narrative.

3.3.2 *Ethics and the golden age*

Let us examine the argument in the *Codex Vaticanus* passage in more detail. Dicaearchus argues that the practice of good deeds is what made (and, we might think, still really makes) someone a good man and, moreover, a philosopher and a wise man. The claim is predicated on an idealised account of early human history. The argument is as follows: (1) as a matter of fact the ancients were good and wise men because of their good deeds; (2) they performed these good deeds not because of any theoretical enquiry, cleverness, or *logos* on their part, but rather because they just 'got' what they ought to do, how they ought to do it, and then did it. On its own, this is not a very persuasive argument. It requires at least another premiss explaining why ancient men just 'got' it. We may suspect this was because of their intrinsically good nature that would play itself out naturally if left to its own devices, a nature that has since been stymied, corrupted, or weakened by the emergence of *logos* in general and the *technē* of popular speech (*λόγος ὀχλικός*) in particular.⁵⁹ This clearly would make their original nature essentially 'political', in accordance with Aristotle's famous principle that 'man is a political animal'.⁶⁰ The proper realisation of this political nature is to

hints of golden age motifs, such as access to ancient wisdom that predates the so-called seven sages, in fragments of Aristotle's *On Philosophy* (26–9 Gigon).

⁵⁹ On the standard depiction of golden age man as intrinsically good, see further Boys-Stones (2001: 11–14, 18–27).

⁶⁰ For a catalogue of passages in which Aristotle discusses the concept, see Mulgan (1974: 438–45). There is no explicit evidence that Aristotle himself considered the men of the golden age to be political. However, we get a similar sort of picture to what we find with Dicaearchus in the Stoic Posidonius' (c.135–151 BC) account of the golden age, as reported by Seneca in *Moral Letter* 90. Posidonius maintained that golden age men were

partake in politics, marry, and so forth. This seems relatively straightforward, but it is clear that there are more sophisticated philosophical elements at play.

The most striking claim is that philosophy can be undertaken without *logos*: in ancient times men did philosophy, but *logos* was not involved at all. The claim obviously needs some analysis – why did the ancients do philosophy without speech? The point is that the ancients *knew* what to do – they had knowledge of virtue – and so they did not need to talk about it, to any extent at all: these ancient golden age men knew how to live their lives well, so they did not need to question or discuss what they knew already but instead simply ‘got on with it’.⁶¹ Hence they did not indulge in the sort of philosophical debate over the best life that later became commonplace. Indeed, the whole debate is in a sense unnecessary; it itself is a symptom of a disease.⁶² The very fact that it has arisen is indicative of some problem in how people live or think about living, the cause of which is the development of popular speech and subsequent competing conceptions of wisdom and living well. The problem arises when what is known and does not need to be theorised and debated becomes theorised and debated. As a cultural phenomenon, this is undoubtedly of interest to Dicaearchus, as White argues; but it also has ethical ramifications, to which, I suggest, Dicaearchus was very sensitive.

But why should we think that these ancient men were doing philosophy at all rather than just getting on with their lives? Boys-Stones, for example, argues that Dicaearchus maintained that golden age life is in fact ‘pre-philosophical’, stressing that ‘Dicaearchus was at pains to explain that we should say of early men that they *lived well* and yet were *not philosophers*’.⁶³ But the

in political communities and well ruled by the wise (90.5). It seems that these men were ‘political animals’ in the Aristotelian sense, since they followed nature in forming such political communities (*sed primi mortalium quique ex his geniti naturam incorrupti sequebantur eundem habebant et ducem et legem, commissi melioris arbitrio; natura est enim potioribus deteriora summittere*, 90.4).

⁶¹ Note that the golden age men could speak (*Codex Vaticanus* 435.23–6); they just did not feel the need to discuss how to live well.

⁶² Compare Boys-Stones (2001: 16–17).

⁶³ Boys-Stones (2001: 16); a similar idea is presented by Wehrli (1967: 50) and Müller (1989: 103–4). It is also worth saying that Boys-Stones’ account of Dicaearchus’

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Codex Vaticanus passage supports the view that the ancient golden age men were genuinely doing philosophy and living what might well be called 'philosophical lives'.⁶⁴ Dicaearchus seems to hold the view that the enactment of virtue or the practice of good deeds is what doing philosophy ultimately consists in (cf Arist. *EN* 10.9, 1179a33–b4); hence the striking claims about the ancients 'doing philosophy' (albeit not with speech) and 'being philosophers' (ἐν δὲ τοῖς πάλαι χρόνοις ὁ ἀγαθὸς μόνος ἦν φιλόσοφος). Indeed, this is also why Dicaearchus marginalises the importance of theorising, enquiry, and contemplation: they are not at all requisite for doing philosophy or living a good life, as evidenced by these historical men of virtue who needed no *logos* whatsoever, who did not enquire or talk about the nature of the good yet performed good deeds and did what they ought. Thus, so long as we accept the factual accuracy of the historical

position accords significantly with that of the early Stoics, who describe a 'pre-technical, pre-philosophical age in which man "automatically" did what was right without the need for reflection on the nature of virtue' (42). Seneca extols this view of ancient man assertively in *Moral Letter* 90, maintaining that they were in fact ignorant, despite living excellent lives, and so not philosophers or wise men at all (90.44–6). In contrast, I align Dicaearchus more closely with Posidonius, who seems to share the view that the ancients were indeed doing philosophy and so warranted the title philosophers and wise men (90.5–30, 44–6). Indeed, it seems to me highly probable that there is a direct line of influence between Dicaearchus and Posidonius, perhaps via Posidonius' teacher Panaetius (c.185–c.110 BC) who, according to Cicero, always had Dicaearchus on his lips (*Fin.* 4.79). This threatens to complicate the issue of whether or not Dicaearchus' influence on Cicero was direct or mediated through these Stoic philosophers. To be sure, Cicero actually studied under Posidonius at Rhodes (Cic. *Fat.* 5; Plut. *Cic.* 4.5), maintaining close contact thereafter (e.g., *Att.* 2.1.2 = 21 SB), and he was of course familiar with much of their work (e.g., Cic. *Fin.* 1.6, 4.23, *Off.* 3.7–8, 3.10). In all likelihood Panaetius did have a significant influence on Cicero's *De republica*: he is named at 1.15 and, most significantly, at 1.34 where Laelius mentions Scipio's discussions on political matters with both Panaetius and Polybius; see further Büchner (1984: 97, 117–18). Strasburger (1965) makes the case that Posidonius was a major influence on Cicero's thinking, even though he is not mentioned because of the dramatic setting. The problem of tracing the nature of Peripatetic influence on Cicero has been noted more generally by, for example, Frede (1989: 80–1). It seems, however, that given Cicero's own first-hand affiliation with a great many of the works of Dicaearchus himself (see above) we need not concern ourselves too much about whether or not to posit an intermediate source.

⁶⁴ To be sure, Boys-Stones does stress frequently that it is the style or mode of theoretical philosophy in particular that is being denied to these men, which I think is clearly on the right track: Dicaearchus held that the ancients were indeed philosophers, just philosophers of a different mode to the theorists that now preponderate. I suspect part of the problem is that Boys-Stones (2001: 16) cites only until ἀρχαίων γενέσθαι τέχνην when considering this passage.

account, there is an exceptionally strong case for accepting that *logos* and philosophical theorising are simply not needed for a human being to live the best life (if anything, they can make it harder to achieve).

Obvious objections arise: why should we accept Dicaearchus' view of human history? More specifically, why should we accept the assumption supporting his argument, namely that ancient men possessed such a nature that they acted virtuously without *logos*, without enquiry or questioning? Indeed, it seems that we have returned to the crux of the debate that we identified earlier: competing accounts of human nature are driving the controversy. In contrast with what we have seen, however, the account of human nature supporting Dicaearchus' position is not a model of the soul but rather a narrative or historical account of the decline and degeneration of the human race as a whole.

According to Porphyry, Dicaearchus said that the ancients were 'by nature the best' (βελτίστους τε ὄντας φύσει) and that 'they led the best life' (καὶ τὸν ἄριστον ἐξηκότας βίον) (*De abs.* 4.2.1), the 'blessed life' (μακάριος βίος, 4.2.9). This confirms our suspicion above: in the case of ancient humans their intrinsically good nature simply played itself out, and this is what made them virtuous and ensured that they lived the best life. We are then informed that the best life these men led was one of practical action, conducted within proper limits (4.2.3–6). However, now humans 'consist of a debased and most vile matter' (κιβδήλου καὶ φαυλοτάτης ὑπάρχοντας ὕλης, 4.2.1–2). They have degenerated over the course of civilisation (4.2.6–9). Disappointingly, Porphyry does not tell us the causes of this degeneration.

Perhaps we can infer, however, from the *Codex Vaticanus* passage that *logos* and enquiry have an important role to play in the decline of humankind. We can see there that the development of persuasive speech and enquiry spoiled the practical virtue of the good men. It was a distorting medium that led to a change in values and practices as people began to question and enquire.⁶⁵

⁶⁵ There are significant parallels with the account of degeneration given by Posidonius. For him, the decline of the well-ruled political communities that existed in the golden age begins once vice emerges (Sen. *Ep.* 90.6, 36). The source of vice appears to be greed and

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There are two possible ways in which the emergence of such things caused the degeneration of humankind: (1) they may have altered the intrinsic nature of human beings; (2) they may have altered or obstructed the natural mechanism(s) through which human beings' good nature expressed itself, thus leading men to live base, imperfect lives. I think we should reject (1) – that would make the comparison between the golden race and the present much less persuasive: if the life of practical action was the best for them, owing to their special nature, what relevance does that have for humankind now if we are of a different nature?⁶⁶ On the other hand, (2) seems very compelling. It maintains continuity between the golden age and the present by keeping intrinsic human nature the same: we are still essentially political animals. Instead, it evokes something like the *nomos/phusis* distinction. It leaves open the possibility that we still might live the best life, the political life epitomised by the ancients, if only we can overcome the (artificial) obstacles now raised by *logos*, persuasive speech, and enquiry. To be sure, in the present state of society or human development *logos* has a vital positive role to play: it is through philosophical discussion and enquiry, of the very sort that Dicaearchus himself is undertaking, that we can find our way back to the right conception of the best life, epitomised by the ancients. Philosophical enquiry and theoretical reflection are not only symptoms of a disease but also the means to cure it.⁶⁷ Thus, the best human life is the same as it has always

luxury (90.7–10, 16–20, 37–40); and greed and luxury seem to arise from or concurrently with the development of the technical arts, such as building and mining, which altered radically the ways in which people lived and the things they valued (90.7–45). Seneca himself agrees with much of what Posidonius has to say about the causes of degeneration, even though he finds fault with Posidonius' characterisations of philosophy's role and the nature of the wise. For further discussion of the extent to which Seneca represents an early Stoic view on the matter, see Boys-Stones (2001: 18–26).

⁶⁶ The vocabulary used by Porphyry is important here. There is no indication that the nature of human beings has changed. The judgement on present human beings is about their 'matter' (ὕλη) rather than their 'nature' (φύσις). The judgement seems to concern the different way their nature has been realised rather than the different status of their intrinsic essence or nature per se. Thus, the golden versus iron comparison is not to do with intrinsic nature. Compare Saunders (2001: 246–7), who worries about the changing nature of man.

⁶⁷ At which stage they will no longer be needed: the success of such a mode of philosophy is its death.

been, but it has become much more difficult to achieve in the present circumstances.

Of course, Dicaearchus still has to assure us of the truth of his view of human nature and his historical account of humans living the best life. The historical truth is guaranteed, according to Dicaearchus, by the accounts of the poets (Porphyry, *De abs.* 4.2.2–3).⁶⁸ This may seem a weak explanation to us, but we do not have to question it further. Indeed, we need not probe the truth of the intrinsic political nature of human beings either. Even if we admit their truth hypothetically in the same way as we accept the premisses of a thought-experiment, we can appreciate the force of Dicaearchus' argument for the supremacy of the practical life. His full argument, in succinct form, would be something like the following: (1) if it is possible to conceive of human beings living the best life without theory or enquiry or *logos*, then such things are not needed for the best life; (2) it is possible to conceive this, as the depiction of men of just the same nature as now living the life of practical action in the myth of the golden age demonstrates; (3) hence, contemplation or theoretical reflection is not needed for the best life whereas practical action is. Importantly, Dicaearchus does not have to claim that the life of contemplation is worse than that lived by the men of the golden age.⁶⁹ All he need claim is that contemplation is, at best, superfluous for the best life and that it is, at worst, a corrupting influence.⁷⁰

3.3.3 *What does the life of practical action involve?*

We have reconstructed the core of Dicaearchus' argument. However, it has not been made clear what exactly this life of

⁶⁸ Boys-Stones (2001: 28–38, 49–59) shows how the notion that the poets had access to 'original wisdom' or the facts pertaining in ancient times was well established, and how this argumentative strategy of appealing to the poets was widely employed by those invoking the golden age for ethical purposes.

⁶⁹ We need not conclude that Dicaearchus was a primitivist, as maintained by, for example, Edelstein (1967: 134–5), Wehrli (1967: 56), and Dodds (1973: 16–17). Note also Saunders (2001: 240 n. 4).

⁷⁰ White (2001: 197–8) may be correct to say that Dicaearchus shows a concern for both practical and intellectual wisdom in a human life. But it is none the less clear where the emphasis falls, and it is in direct opposition to Aristotle and Theophrastus, for whom the emphasis falls the other way. The nature of the *controversia* has become clear.

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practical action would involve in the present socio-political environment as opposed to the earth of the golden age. There, certain practices were 'good deeds', and doing them constituted doing philosophy and being a 'good man': practices such as friendship (Porphyry, *De abs.* 4.2.5), engaging in politics, and marrying (*Codex Vaticanus* 435.15–17). Given the normative force of the golden age scenario, these must all be categorically 'natural' and 'good' human practices; therefore, performing them properly must be 'good' in all cases. Thus, it is not surprising that Dicaearchus seems to have advocated these very same practices in the present circumstances, placing particular stress on practising politics and being active in civic life.

The best evidence we have comes from Cicero.⁷¹ In a letter to Atticus, composed shortly before 2.16 (= 36 SB), he writes: *Dicaearchum recte amas. luculentus homo est et civis haud paulo melior quam isti nostri ἀδικαίαρχοι* ('You admire Dicaearchus rightly. He is a brilliant man, and not by a little a better citizen than those unjust rulers of ours', 2.12.4 = 30 SB). Scholars have been puzzled by this passage: why does Cicero say that Dicaearchus is a better citizen than the triumvirs, those to whom he refers with the pun ἀδικαίαρχοι?⁷² I think the passage has to be interpreted firmly in its social context. Why does Cicero consider the triumvirs to be poor citizens? Clearly he thought that they were acting for their own good rather than for the good of the *res publica*, for which they ought to act, as he himself had done (*Att.* 2.3.4 = 23 SB, 2.7.4 = 27 SB, 2.9.2 = 29 SB), and which they were in fact prepared to jeopardise (2.9.2–3). Furthermore, they were acting poorly towards their fellow citizens by manipulating them, intimidating them, and making their civic position

⁷¹ There is another interesting piece of evidence from Plutarch's *Old Men in Public Affairs* (796c–797a). However, Dicaearchus is mentioned only with respect to a particular turn of phrase (περιπατεῖν, 'doing peripatetics'), and it is not at all obvious that any more of Plutarch's material should be attributed to him. Yet scholars tend to see Dicaearchus in this passage. Natali (1991: 142) thinks the whole passage is taken from Dicaearchus and Huby (2001: 322) thinks 'the tone of the passage is such as to make it likely that it was by Dicaearchus'. Certainly, the comment that practising politics is similar to doing philosophy (ὁμοιον δ' ἐστὶ τῷ φιλοσοφεῖν τὸ πολιτεύεσθαι) resonates with what we have already seen in the *Codex Vaticanus*. However, there is no reason to think that Plutarch is reporting the views of Dicaearchus here, despite this general coincidence.

⁷² See, for instance, Huby (2001: 313–14).

untenable, to which Cicero's own situation bears testament (2.3.3–4, 2.5.1–2 = 25 SB, 2.7.4, 2.9.1–3).

But why does Cicero criticise them by comparing their worth as citizens with that of Dicaearchus? We do not know whether Dicaearchus himself was an outstanding citizen – the evidence we have for his life does not suggest he was a brilliant public figure (indeed, at Athens he was a metic). The key lies in the pun. The term ἀδικαίαρχοι does not just refer to the triumvirs being unjust rulers, but also to the fact that they were acting in an ‘un-Dicaearchan’ fashion. In other words, Cicero insists that they were acting against the precepts concerning the role of the good citizen laid down by Dicaearchus, which he presumes Atticus (the ‘friend of Dicaearchus’) knows. What were these precepts? We can infer from Cicero's comment that, according to Dicaearchus, the good citizen should value the greater good of the city over his own interests, a familiar picture from Aristotle (e.g., *EN* 1.2, 1094b7–10; *Pol.* 1.2, 1252b30);⁷³ the good citizen should always act from the *honestum* rather than the *utile* (if there is a conflict).⁷⁴ This resonates with the picture of the golden age in the *Codex Vaticanus* where men practised politics finely, which we can imagine meant that they served their communities not for their own good but for the greater good. We can also infer that the good citizen should act well towards his fellow citizens, which accords with the picture from Plutarch's *Table Talk* (659f2–660a1). It seems reasonable to conclude from this that in socio-political environments such as late republican Rome the Dicaearchan *praktikos bios* is, in the words of Huby, ‘the life of an upright citizen’ who is concerned with the greater good of the political community.⁷⁵

⁷³ Thus, when, in *Att.* 2.16.3, Cicero remarks that he thinks he has satisfied Dicaearchus, he is commenting on his good deeds in the service of the state (cf 2.3.4, 2.7.4, 2.9.2).

⁷⁴ Of course it is still permissible for one to act from the *utile*, in so far as it is not at the expense of the *honestum* and the good of the state. This becomes especially important in our analysis of *Att.* 7.3 = 126 SB in section 3.4 below. Compare also *De officiis* 1.58, 1.160, 3.7–8, 3.90.

⁷⁵ Huby (2001: 324). This picture suggests that such a life is not necessarily one of statesmanship and high politics but can also comprise regular everyday civic actions. The passage from Plutarch's *Old Men in Public Affairs* (796c–797a), which we have rejected as evidence for Dicaearchus' views, supports this. There ‘practising politics’ is shown to include everyday activities such as taking an interest in how the city is being administered, giving advice, and so forth, as well as actually leading the city oneself.

3.4 Dicaearchus' influence on Cicero: *Epistulae ad Atticum* 7.3

Dicaearchus' argument figures significantly in Cicero's deliberations on the question of the best life and the relationship between philosophy and political activity. We have already seen this with regard to *Epistulae ad Atticum* 2.16 from April 59 BC,⁷⁶ which prompted our reconstruction of Dicaearchus' argument and his place in the Peripatetic tradition. In this section I focus on *Epistulae ad Atticum* 7.3 (= 126 SB), in which there is another illuminating example of Dicaearchus' influence on Cicero's thinking. Soon after returning to Italy from his stint as governor of Cilicia, in a letter dated 9 December 50 BC, Cicero writes to Atticus:

ac primum illud in quo te Dicaearcho adsentiri negas: etsi cupidissime expetitur a me est et te approbante ne diutius anno in provincia essem, tamen non est nostra contentione perfectum . . . ut iam ne istius quidem rei culpam sustineam, quod minus diu fuerim in provincia quam fortasse fuerit utile.

sed 'quid si hoc melius?' saepe opportune dici videtur, ut in hoc ipso. sive enim ad concordiam res adduci potest sive ad bonorum victoriam, utriusvis rei me aut adiutorem velim esse aut certe non expertem; sin vincuntur boni, ubicumque essem, una cum iis victus essem. qua re celeritas nostri reditus ἀμεταμέλητος debet esse. quod si ista nobis cogitatio de triumpho iniecta non esset, quam tu quoque approbas, ne tu haud multum requireres illum virum qui in sexto libro informatus est. quid enim tibi faciam, qui illos libros devorasti? quin nunc ipsum non dubitabo rem tantam abicere, si id erit rectius. utrumque vero simul agi non potest, et de triumpho ambitiose et de re publica libere. sed ne dubitaris quin, quod honestius, id mihi futurum sit antiquius. (Cicero, *Epistulae ad Atticum* 7.3.1–2)

First, that point on which you say you disagree with Dicaearchus: although most eagerly I desired, and with your approval, that I not be longer than a year in my province, it was, nevertheless, not brought about by my own effort . . . with the result that now I maintain that I am not at fault for this very thing, that I was in my province for less time than perhaps was expedient.

But 'what if this is for the better?' often seems to be said suitably, as in this instance. For if the situation can be brought to concord or victory for good men, in both cases I would like either to be a help or at least not have no part. On the other hand, if the good men are defeated, wherever I was, I would be defeated together with them. Therefore, the swiftness of my return should not be a cause for regret. But if this thought about a triumph, which you also approve, had not

⁷⁶ See chapter 1, section 1.2 above.

been put into my mind, you would not have much reason at all to search for that man who is presented in the sixth book. What, indeed, do you think I should do, you who have devoured those books? Even now, at this time, I will not hesitate to throw away so great a thing, if it becomes the better thing to do. In truth both roles cannot be acted out simultaneously, both candidate for a triumph and independent statesman. But have no doubts that what is more honourable will be foremost with me.

Cicero professes to be responding to a point made by Atticus (in a letter responding to 6.9 = 123 SB and 7.1 = 124 SB)⁷⁷ regarding the views of Dicaearchus, but then proceeds to offer a defence of his own decision to leave his province and involve himself in the turbulent affairs at Rome. It is important that first we attempt to reconstruct Atticus' professed disagreement with Dicaearchus.

It is clear that Atticus was disagreeing not only with Dicaearchus but also with Cicero. The ultimate dispute concerns Cicero's conduct: Atticus thinks that he should have remained in the east instead of returning to Italy. But why does Atticus involve Dicaearchus, especially since Cicero himself makes no mention of him in letters preceding 7.3? By choosing to disagree with Cicero's conduct by disagreeing with Dicaearchus, it seems that Atticus was engaging philosophically with a point concerning practical ethics; and the choice of lives appears a very likely candidate given what we have seen thus far.⁷⁸ With this in mind we can begin to analyse the nature of Atticus' disagreement.

Importantly, it seems that Atticus did not just dogmatically disagree with Dicaearchus when positing the alternative course of action, namely staying in the east. It seems instead that he presented an argument for his case. From Cicero's letter, we can infer that the force of Atticus' argument was simply that it would have been *utile* for Cicero to stay away from Italy. Atticus appears to have advocated some form of quietism because of the

⁷⁷ See Shackleton Bailey (1965–70: 3.289). I discuss these two letters in section 3.5 below.

⁷⁸ I think Atticus was also sensitive to Cicero's own engagement with the issue in *Att.* 6.9 and 7.1, which will be discussed shortly in section 3.5 below. Shackleton Bailey (1965–70: 3.289) supposes that Atticus wrote something like the following: 'Yes, I think it *would* have been better for you to have stayed, holding as I do that Dicaearchus was wrong to advocate the active life (τὸν πρακτικὸν βίον) in preference to the contemplative (τὸν θεωρητικόν). For in the present state of political ferment you will indeed find more to bother you in Rome than in Cilicia'. I think it was more complicated than this.

advantages it would offer Cicero himself (it would be less dangerous, for instance). This suggests Atticus' argument was Epicurean in its inspiration: for the Epicureans, consideration of the *utile* or συμφέρον is of the utmost importance when determining conduct (cf. e.g., Ep. *KD* 31, 36–40; Herm. *ap.* Porphyry, *De abs.* 1.7.13–8.15, 1.10.1–11.1; Cic. *Fin.* 1.34).⁷⁹ But Cicero himself had already acknowledged to Atticus that such a course of action would have been *utile*: *ridebis hoc loco fortasse: quam vellem etiam nunc in provincia morari! plane opus fuit, si hoc impendebat. etsi nil miserius* ('You will laugh perhaps at this point: how indeed I wish that I still remained in my province! Clearly it was the best option, if this was imminent. And yet nothing is more wretched than it', 7.1.5). He admits that there is a conflict between the claims of the *utile* and the *honestum*, but he demonstrates that ultimately he is not motivated by the claims of expediency. In this instance, for Cicero, clearly the dishonour or shame from staying detached out of concern for one's personal well-being outweighs the risks of acting rightly and returning to the turmoil in Italy; in 7.1 at least, Cicero is not swayed by the Epicurean argument.

My suggestion is that Atticus in fact disagreed with Dicaearchus specifically on the importance of expediency when deliberating on what mode of life to pursue. As we have seen,⁸⁰ as part of his argument for the supremacy of the life of practical action, Dicaearchus emphasised the importance of acting in accordance with the good and the honourable over the expedient when the two conflict. Indeed, it seems that being a good citizen would *always* require subordination to the good, the claims of the state, of any concerns for personal well-being.⁸¹ In contrast, the Epicureans tend to the view that the *utile* is *always* preferable. I think Atticus disagreed with Dicaearchus on this point regarding the *utile*. We can posit that in a letter to Cicero Atticus privileged or emphasised the

⁷⁹ On the Epicureans' focus on the *utile*, see in particular Alberti (1995).

⁸⁰ Section 3.3.3 above.

⁸¹ Indeed, Cicero's comment at *Att.* 2.16.3 (= 36 SB), *puto enim me Dicaearchō adfatim satis fecisse*, suggests that he was in fact falling short of the ideal set down by Dicaearchus, but was content that he had done enough already to make the rebuke less severe.

claims of *utilitas*, at least in certain situations, such as the one in which Cicero found himself now.

To be sure, the tension between what is expedient and what is strictly good was a well-recognised issue in practical ethics, and Atticus and Cicero had had exchanges with regard to it on numerous earlier occasions,⁸² as they also did in the weeks and months following 7.3.⁸³ Moreover, such an argument would be in keeping with exchanges Atticus and Cicero had had before: in certain instances Cicero himself had privileged the claims of what is expedient over the claims of what is strictly good (e.g., 2.1.8 = 21 SB, 2.19.1 = 39 SB).⁸⁴ On this basis Atticus could have argued that Cicero too is committed to the position that the *utile* is at least sometimes to be preferred. Indeed, it appears that they both agree that Dicaearchus is wrong to maintain that one should *always* act on the *honestum*: there are some cases where acting stubbornly in accordance with the good (being a good citizen in Dicaearchan terms) might in fact lead to greater evils, not only personally but also for the state itself.⁸⁵

Such an argument against Dicaearchus could be couched in general terms. However, Atticus also may have stressed to Cicero a number of specific factors against his returning to Italy and involving himself in political affairs there, such as the limited chance to achieve anything of substance given his weak political position, the dangers of him precipitating the evils of civil war and harming the *res publica*, and perhaps even the view that ultimately he would be of more help to the *res publica* in the east.⁸⁶ Given such considerations, it is fair to act from expediency – and that dictates staying detached. Thus, by presenting an argument

⁸² Cf e.g., 2.1.8 = 21 SB, 2.2.3–4 = 22 SB, 2.19.1 = 39 SB, 4.5.1–2 = 80 SB, 4.6.1–2 = 83 SB.

⁸³ Cf e.g., 7.10 = 133 SB, 7.12.1–4 = 135 SB, 7.13 = 136 SB, 7.19–24 = 143–8 SB, 7.26.2–3 = 150 SB, 8.2.4 = 152 SB, 8.3 = 153 SB, 8.4.3 = 156 SB, 8.12 = 162 SB, 8.14.2–3 = 164 SB, 8.15.2–3 = 165 SB, 9.2 = 168 SB, 9.2a = 169 SB. For discussion of the tension in these letters, see Leonhardt (1995) and Brunt (1986). See also [chapter 2, section 2.5](#) above.

⁸⁴ See pages 54–5 above.

⁸⁵ Cicero himself betrays such concerns in his deliberations at *Att.* 9.4.2 = 173 SB, on which see [chapter 2, section 2.5.3](#) above.

⁸⁶ Being a good citizen might at times require a more long-term outlook with regard to the good and well-being of the state.

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against Dicaearchus emphasising the legitimate claims of expediency and Cicero's own commitment to this view, Atticus could first overthrow Cicero's belief that staying detached was *miserum* and then motivate such a course of action in the present instance. This would also help explain why in 7.3 Cicero replies to Atticus in the overtly philosophical terms that he does.

Cicero seems to have found Atticus' stance something of a volte-face. He twice notes Atticus' earlier approval of the course of action he was pursuing. He also argues that he himself did not deliberately contrive to return from his province earlier than might have been expedient. But, rather than relying on such personalised modes of reply, Cicero engages with the philosophical debate evoked by Atticus. In the second paragraph especially, Cicero justifies his decision in moral terms and makes a direct reply to Atticus' argument regarding the claims of *utilitas*.

First, Cicero claims that by returning to Italy he will in fact be involved in ensuring good outcomes for the *res publica*, namely *concordia* or a victory for the good men (*boni*). He presents himself as wanting to pursue the active life in a Dicaearchan fashion because he is motivated by a concern for the good of the *res publica* rather than his own benefit. But this argument is not simply a counter-assertion of the claims of the good over the expedient. Cicero is also making the point that what is really expedient (or in all likelihood expedient) for the *res publica* is for him to return to Italy and help foster *concordia*.⁸⁷ Furthermore, in a crafty shift from his previous position in 7.1, he asserts that a bad outcome would see him 'defeated' (*victus essem*) regardless of his geographical location (*ubicumque*). Therefore, staying detached *in provincia* would be no consolation for him even if the worst-case scenario unfolded; it would not in fact be expedient for him personally to do this in this instance, because his own happiness is dependent on the good of the *res publica*. Thus, Cicero undercuts Atticus' argument from expediency on two

⁸⁷ Cicero's argument rests on the assumption that this positive outcome is much more likely than the evil of civil war if he returns, which in turn rests on his confidence that he could help achieve a positive outcome in the short-term through active involvement in political affairs.

levels, and he justifies his decision on the levels of both expediency and the good.

Cicero then moves to counter an obvious objection to this account (*quod si*). He acknowledges that personal ambition, his desire for a triumph (which he also attributes to Atticus), is also motivating him.⁸⁸ His honesty undercuts the basis of his first argument: he is not so disinterested after all. But Cicero goes on the offensive: he portrays himself not only as acting with certain philosophical ideals in mind, but also as actually epitomising such ideals. He claims that without this (understandable) desire he would embody the man – the ideal statesman – presented in the sixth book of his own *De republica*.

From the little we can see in the sixth book, the key concern appears to be the duties of the good citizen in times of civil strife and the breakdown of the proper functioning of the *res publica*. Civil strife is mentioned a number of times in the fragments placed at the book's beginning: *earque dissensio civium, quod seorsum eunt alii ad alios, seditio dicitur* ('and such a conflict among the citizens, where some are set in opposition to the others, is called sedition', 6.1); *et vero in dissensione civili* ('and indeed in civil strife', 6.1). The good citizen (the ideal statesman) must be armed to protect the state against such threats (*quam ob rem se comparet hic civis ita necesse est, ut sic contra haec, quae statum civitatis permovent, semper armatus*, 6.1).⁸⁹ In contrast to civil strife is *concordia* between citizens; in *De republica* Cicero makes *concordia* between the classes (*concordia ordinum*) absolutely critical to the welfare and proper functioning of the state (e.g., 1.49, 2.69, 3.23, 3.41).⁹⁰

⁸⁸ Cicero's desire for a triumph pervades the letters of this period and was an ongoing fixation. See further [chapter 1, n. 77](#) above.

⁸⁹ The Latin terms *dissensio* and *seditio* capture the sense of the Greek στάσις. Cicero's practice in translating στάσις is interesting. He translates it as *seditio* in a direct allusion to Solon's law regarding *stasis* (*Att.* 10.1.2 = 190 SB), which Aristotle reproduces in *Constitution of the Athenians* (8). But compare also *De finibus* 1.44: the various connotations of the Greek seem to have required a number of Latin terms to capture them fully (e.g., *discidia*, *discordia*, *seditio*); also *Rep.* 1.49 (*discordia*).

⁹⁰ For further discussion, see, for example, Strasburger (1956: 15–70), Boren (1964), Rawson (1971), and Wood (1988: 193–9).

3.4 Dicaearchus' influence on Cicero

It is not difficult to infer from this how Cicero's argument ran in the sixth book of *De republica*: the ideal statesman must immerse himself in practical affairs during times of civil strife in order to resolve it (foster *concordia*) and ensure the good of the *res publica*. This is a vital role for him to perform in his capacity of *rector* or *conservator rei publicae*.⁹¹ Indeed, this is explicit in the Dream of Scipio, where he is implored to bring to an end the divisions in the state brought about by Tiberius Gracchus and to restore order and safety (6.11–12). In addition, at 6.8 Scipio states that the wise man does not desire statues or triumphs but rather *stabiliora quaedam et viridiora praemiorum genera* ('more stable and lasting kinds of reward'): one of which is *concordia*, the good health, stability, and proper functioning of the state. This is the exact point Cicero is making in his letter to Atticus: he makes it clear that personal ambition and triumphs are ultimately subservient to the good of the state (*sed ne dubitaris quin, quod honestius, id mihi futurum sit antiquius*).

It is clear that this material in the sixth book of *De republica* has obvious and direct relevance to the political situation in which Cicero found himself at the time of this letter. But it also resonates with the Dicaearchan context and the question of the choice of lives. In the Dream of Scipio it is made clear that working for concord and the good of the state is a greater good than any other (6.16, 6.26, 6.29). Indeed, as Zetzel comments, Cicero makes 'individual morality contingent on the values of civic life and public service';⁹² and the Dream of Scipio illustrates most brilliantly that this active life as a good citizen in the service of the state is the most blessed sort of life: the rewards for such a virtuous life are posthumous, immortal, and in the heavens (6.13, 6.16, 6.25–6, 6.29; cf 3.6).

We can now fully appreciate Cicero's argument in this letter. He justifies his pursuit of the active life in a Dicaearchan fashion by claiming that he plans to work disinterestedly, as a good citizen (the ideal statesman), for *concordia* and the good of the *res*

⁹¹ See Powell (1994); also Büchner (1984: 427–9) and Wood (1988: 193).

⁹² Zetzel (1999: xvii). Note also *Rep.* 5.7: *nec bene vivi sine bona re publica posset nec esse quicquam civitate bene constituta beatius*.

publica in its troubled times;⁹³ he is motivated by the good and honourable and what is expedient for the state rather than by what is advantageous for himself. And, via his allusion to the sixth book of his own *De republica*, he also implies that such a mode of life is blessed and will provide him with happiness.⁹⁴ This is a philosophical reply to Atticus made in recognisably Dicaearchan terms. The exchange between the two concerns the persuasiveness of Dicaearchus' argument for the supremacy of the practical life, and through sustained argument Cicero justifies his decision in this particular instance to pursue it in Italy. However, it is not yet clear to what extent Cicero's conduct was motivated in the first instance by Dicaearchus in particular or the philosophical debate surrounding the best life in general. In order to assess this, we must look more closely at two letters preceding 7.3.

3.5 *Epistulae ad Atticum* 6.9 and 7.1

A compelling case can be made that Cicero engaged with the question of the best life in the two letters, 6.9 (= 123 SB) and 7.1 (= 124 SB), to which Atticus was replying when he disagreed with Dicaearchus. At the end of his gubernatorial service Cicero returned to Italy via Athens. Having already voiced his fears over news he had heard regarding Caesar's military actions (6.8.2–3 = 122 SB), at the very end of the final letter of book 6, dated 15 October 50 BC and written while in Athens, Cicero writes:

tu mihi, ut polliceris, de Tullioli mea, id est de Dolabella, perscribes, de re publica, quam provideo in summis periculis . . . Id. Oct. has dedi litteras, quo die,

⁹³ Note that here in 50 BC it seems that the *concordia* Cicero has in mind is *concordia ordinum*: this would mean that he hopes to foster *concordia* between Pompey's faction and the followers of Caesar. But at *Att.* 7.13.1 = 136 SB he states that the civil strife is not a class conflict among the citizens. As discussed in [chapter 2, section 2.5.2](#) above, from this point in 49 BC the *concordia* that Cicero has in mind is not *concordia ordinum* but rather that between aristocratic individuals, between friends.

⁹⁴ Compare *Att.* 10.4.4 = 195 SB where Cicero alludes to a lost part of *De republica* when assessing his own actions in comparison to those of Caesar and Pompey: *et si, ut nos a te admonemur, recte in illis libris diximus nihil esse bonum nisi quod honestum, nihil malum nisi quod turpe sit, certe uterque istorum est miserrimus, quorum utrique semper patriae salus et dignitas posterior sua dominatione et domesticis commodis fuit*. This essentially summarises Cicero's reasoning in the letter we have just witnessed. It also sounds remarkably Dicaearchan in spirit.

3.5 *Epistulae ad Atticum* 6.9 and 7.1

ut scribis, Caesar Placentiam legiones IIII. quaeso, quid nobis futurum est? in arce Athenis statio mea nunc placet. (Cicero, *Epistulae ad Atticum* 6.9.4)

May you write to me, as you promise, about my little Tullia, that is about Dolabella, and about the political affairs of the state, which I foresee to be in the greatest danger ... I have sent this letter on the Ides of October, the day on which, so you write, Caesar brings four legions to Placentia. I ask you, what is to become of us? My station in the citadel of Athens now pleases me.

Here Cicero presents a martial image of himself as a soldier positioned in the citadel of Athens. The martial element is conveyed by *statio*, a term with strong military connotations, referring as it does to a soldier's post. The theme of physical safety is central to the passage: Cicero is pleased to be in Athens, away from all the dangers and intrigues bedevilling Italy and the *res publica*, at least for the moment.⁹⁵ But the image of Cicero positioned in the citadel of Athens is more significant than this. Athens was of course the traditional seat of philosophy, and Cicero often presents Athens as being synonymous with the pursuit of philosophy and philosophical activities (e.g., *Fin.* 5.2–8, *Off.* 1.1, 3.6). The use of *arx* in this context recalls that stock image of the philosopher safe and tranquil in the citadel of the mind, protected by philosophical knowledge from the intrigues and dangers of the world (e.g., Plat. *Rep.* 560b6–c1; Luc. *DRN* 2.1–19; Epict. *Disc.* 4.5.25–32; Jerome, *Adv. Iov.* 2.8; cf also Cic. *DND* 2.140–1). Cicero employs the same image in a letter to his brother Quintus from 56 BC: *nos enim ita philologi sumus ut vel cum fabris habitare possimus. habemus hanc philosophiam non ab Hymetto sed ab arce nostra* ('For me in fact, although I am a scholarly man, I am yet able to live with the carpenters. I have this philosophy not from Mt Hymettus but from our own citadel', 2.9.3 = 12 SB).⁹⁶ Indeed, Cicero had already described philosophy as a form

⁹⁵ Shackleton Bailey (1965–70: 3.277) interprets the comment as follows: 'a jest seems to be intended here; Cicero rather likes his "station" behind the walls of the citadel in these dangerous times (*nunc*)'.

⁹⁶ Shackleton Bailey (1980: 188) comments: 'Cicero means that he did not need Greek philosophy to teach him to put up with inconvenience; early training in his native hill country had done that'. The conceit of the 'citadel of philosophy', which allows safe distance or refuge in the face of intrigue, inconvenience, and the like, is clear. Also, Mt

of mental armour or protection in a letter to Atticus (4.18.2 = 92 SB). The same motifs appear in these passages: philosophy (or the life of *otium*) provides tranquillity and refuge from political intrigues and pressures.⁹⁷ With this in mind, Cicero's 'station' or 'post' in *arce Athenis* can now be interpreted figuratively: no longer is he likened simply to a soldier holding his post but rather to a philosopher holding his, safe behind the fortifications of the mind. Cicero's concluding remark in *arce Athenis statio mea nunc placet* can be considered a clever and poetic way of conveying his current satisfaction with *otium* and the philosophical life at Athens.

There are some further arguments in favour of interpreting the image in this fashion. Cicero was probably actively pursuing philosophical interests while he stayed in Athens on his homeward journey from Cilicia. Although the letters themselves do not make clear what Cicero did at Athens, Plutarch writes that he associated with the foremost men of culture and yearned for his old pastimes (Cic. 36.7), namely intellectual studies. At this point of his biography, Plutarch stresses a distinction between Cicero's favoured philosophical life of *otium* (at Athens) and his tumultuous political life in Italy during the civil war (36.7–37.4) and as governor of Cilicia previously (36.1–6).⁹⁸ We should be careful not to rely too much on Plutarch's account. However, when Cicero stayed at Athens on his way to Cilicia he lodged for ten days with the Academic philosopher Aristus, the brother of Antiochus and his successor as scholar (Philod. *Ind. Acad.* col. 35.2–3 Dorandi; Cic. *Fin.* 5.8, *Acad.* 1.12),⁹⁹ and looked into the philosophical

Hymettus is in the vicinity of Athens, reinforcing the identification of Athens with philosophy.

⁹⁷ Note that in *Att.* 4.18.2 the imagery is anatomical rather than martial. See also [chapter 1, section 1.2](#) above.

⁹⁸ See Moles (1988: 185). Note that in Plutarch's *Cicero*, for which the *Brutus* (3.1–4.7) and Cicero's letters (24.8–9, 29.7–8, 36.4–6, 37.2–4, 40.2–3, 43.4, 43.6–7, 45.2–3) are key sources, Cicero's conduct and life story are routinely presented and assessed in this framework – see further Moles (1988: 10, 150–1). Furthermore, in the *Brutus* (303–22) Cicero himself presents and assesses his early career in the framework of two competing modes of life (cf *Att.* 2.16.3, *Rep.* 1.7–8).

⁹⁹ Not much is known about Aristus. No works are attested to him. However, as well as referring to his lectures (*Fin.* 5.8, *Acad.* 1.12), in the second book of the *Academica* (*Lucullus*) Cicero describes Aristus engaging in philosophical debate with himself,

scene on offer. He writes to Atticus: *philosophia sursum deorsum. si quid est, est in Aristo, apud quem eram* ('Philosophy is all over the place. If there is any, it is with Aristus, at whose house I am staying', 5.10.5 = 103 SB; cf 5.11.4 = 104 SB). In 5.11.6 he also tells Atticus that he has put him in great favour with Patro and the Epicureans.¹⁰⁰ He was clearly associating with important philosophical figures on his outward voyage. If Cicero were staying with Aristus again and taking the chance to pursue his philosophical interests on his homeward journey, as Plutarch suggests, the image *in arce Athenis statio mea* would rest more obviously in a philosophical context.¹⁰¹

In fact, 6.9 is full of technical Greek philosophical terminology, allusion, and badinage; Cicero is actively playing the philosopher in this letter. At 6.9.2 there is a joke on the ambition (φιλοτιμία) of Philotimus, a freedman of Cicero's wife Terentia who was stealing money by 'cooking the books': παραφύλαξον, *si me amas*, τὴν τοῦ φυρατοῦ φιλοτιμίαν ('If you love me, keep an eye on the ambition of the chef'; cf 7.1.1). Obviously the joke is a straightforward pun on Philotimus' name, but this reference to φιλοτιμία also seems to refer to Cicero's own ambition for a triumph, *in quo, ut praecipis, nec me κενὸν in expetendo cognosces nec ἄτυφον in abiciendo* ('in which matter, you shall recognise me, as you teach, neither pretentious in demanding nor modest in declining', 6.9.2). The key to understanding this comment is unpacking the sophisticated philosophical joke here: what does Atticus teach?

If we presume that Cicero is referring to Epicurean teachings, then his statement is strange, since we would then expect him to have no ambition for the triumph whatsoever. It appears that Cicero is in fact referring to the Aristotelian notion of moderation,

Antiochus, and other philosophical figures of note (2.12). On Aristus' philosophical relationship to Antiochus and his importance in the history of the Academy, see especially Glucker (1978: 94–123); also Barnes (1989: 57–9) and Brittain (2006: 119).

¹⁰⁰ This was because he intervened with the Roman authorities to save the ruins of Epicurus' house. His letter to Memmius concerning this is still extant (*Fam.* 13.1 = 63 SB).

¹⁰¹ Cicero himself indicates that he was associating with Saufeius at Athens, a mutual friend of Atticus whom he labels a philosopher (7.1.1 = 124 SB, 7.2.4 = 125 SB). In fact he seems to have given 6.9 to Saufeius to deliver to Atticus (6.9.4, 7.1.1). Saufeius was a Roman knight and an Epicurean who composed historical works; on his philosophical credentials, see Castner (1991: 64–7) and Benferhat (2005: 169–70).

the golden mean. Aristotle identifies φιλοτιμία as one of the virtues. He observes that there is a positive and a negative ambition or desire for honour: we praise someone who is eager for honour if he is manly and loves what is fine (ἀνδρώδη καὶ φιλόκαλον), as well as someone who is indifferent to honour if he is temperate and moderate (μέτριον καὶ σώφρονα); but we criticise someone who is eager for honour more than what is right, as well as someone who is indifferent to honour to the extent that he decides not to be honoured for fine things (*EN* 4.4, 1125b1–18) – Aristotle then stresses that there is a mean (1125b18–25).¹⁰² This makes Cicero's comment readily understandable: he will demand the triumph but not too strongly (his φιλοτιμία is not the negative sort); and he will not give up the triumph lightly either, because to be indifferent to honour for one's fine deeds is also bad. Cicero's use of the term ἄτυφος is interesting here. It is a very resonant philosophical term, used especially of the Cynics and Pyrrho with respect to their renunciation of social norms.¹⁰³ Cicero is making the point that he will not act like them and renounce a social honour he has earned. Positive ambition should be within limits, not too low and not too high – and that is how Cicero is acting.¹⁰⁴ In this sense, we can appreciate that Cicero is maintaining his habit of gently mocking Atticus' philosophical credentials by depicting him as a Peripatetic, not an Epicurean;¹⁰⁵ the badinage is clear. Furthermore, by discussing the nature of his ambition in such a high-flown manner, Cicero himself is also playing the philosopher, as befits his current *statio* at Athens.

Cicero maintains the guise of philosopher in the next part of the letter, this time adopting a distinctly Academic voice. At 6.9.3 he pounces on Atticus' self-confessed suspension of judgement (ἐπ' ἑχ' εἰν *te scribebas*) about whether he should leave his brother Quintus in charge of his province. Cicero gently chastises Atticus, claiming that he found his so-called suspension of judgement on the matter to be in fact firm rejection, apparently because

¹⁰² See further Engberg-Pedersen (1983: 81–3). ¹⁰³ See Declava Caizzi (1980).

¹⁰⁴ At 7.1.1 the same joke about Philotimus is made. In this instance there is perhaps also a reference to Caesar's bellicose actions, which it seems are driven by an overload of ambition, which is a bad thing.

¹⁰⁵ See chapter 1, n. 51 above.

Atticus had not argued sufficiently *in utramque partem* on the side of giving power to Quintus: *quid erat dubitatione dignum, si esset quicquam cur placeret fratrem et talem fratrem relinqui?* ἀθέτησις *ista mihi tua, non ἐποχή videbatur* ('What ground would there have been for hesitation, if there had been any reason for why it would be good to leave my brother in charge, and such a brother? Your firm rejection did not seem to me to be suspension of judgement'). Fortunately, however, Cicero agreed with the view that Quintus should not be left in charge (*eadem omnia quasi collocuti essemus vidimus*). Cicero then gently mocks Atticus by saying that his 'long-held suspension of judgement' (ἐπιχρονία ἐποχή) freed him from any hesitation in rejecting the idea that Quintus should be in charge. The whole of 6.9.3 appears to be a humorous caricature of Atticus as a not very adept Academic sceptic: he did not apply the sceptical method properly and so, ironically, he erred in suspending judgement but succeeded in prompting a decisive action.

The philosophical, jovial atmosphere of 6.9 is clear: Cicero is obviously enjoying himself while he plays the philosopher at Athens. But the badinage is in the service of quite serious deliberations, those regarding his triumph and the administration of his province. A final clever piece of philosophical allusion in *in arce Athenis*, servicing a serious point, namely Cicero's current satisfaction with *otium* and the philosophical life in Athens as the political climate darkens in Italy, would not be out of place at all in this letter.

It is fair to presume that Atticus was sensitive to the philosophical connotations of this image at the end of 6.9, and that he saw in Cicero's consideration in 7.1 – written the very day after 6.9 while Cicero was still in Athens – of the pros and cons of two distinct courses of action, staying in the east largely detached from the civil struggle at Rome or proceeding to Italy and becoming involved actively in political affairs, a genuine deliberation on the choice between the philosophical life of *otium* and the political life. To be sure, in 7.1 Cicero entertains but brusquely dismisses staying in the east (the contemplative option), and most of Cicero's deliberations concern the nature of the active life he will pursue in Italy. Given his close personal ties of *amicitia* with both Caesar and Pompey (7.1.2–3), he acknowledges that he now has a

πρόβλημα ('a dilemma') regarding (the public perception of) his loyalties (7.1.2),¹⁰⁶ which is exacerbated by his desire for a triumph (7.1.5, 7, 9). Significantly, he seeks Atticus' help in resolving his predicament (7.1.2–5, 7–9); thus, he anticipates an epistolary response addressing this issue. Now, although rejecting it as a viable option, we can infer from 7.1.5 that Cicero acknowledged that he would essentially avoid the πρόβλημα by not proceeding to Italy. We have seen that in his reply Atticus concurs and provides a sophisticated philosophical argument in favour of this option: Cicero does not have to act in a Dicaearchian manner by pursuing a form of the active life in Italy, because Dicaearchus' argument for pursuing this mode of life does not apply convincingly in this instance; the alternative option is in fact superior given the relevant considerations. Cicero then counters Atticus' argument in 7.3 by demonstrating that Dicaearchus' argument does apply convincingly. We can, therefore, confirm that Cicero's conduct was influenced or informed by the debate over the choice of lives before Atticus' reply, and that this exchange forms a genuine philosophical argument concerning how one ought to weigh the competing claims of the *utile* and the *honestum* when deciding on one's mode of life.

3.6 Conclusion

Epistulae ad Atticum 7.3 – in which Cicero's own conduct is analysed, debated, and ultimately defended in recognisably Dicaearchian terms – suggests a connection between Dicaearchus and the *De republica*; as we have just seen, there is a significant juxtaposition. Indeed, Dicaearchus' influence is apparent in *De republica* in the form of numerous parallels between his argument and those presented by Cicero in favour of the political life.

¹⁰⁶ πρόβλημα has philosophical connotations: it refers to a practical or theoretical problem in geometry and other specialised fields (e.g., Plat. *Rep.* 530b, *Thet.* 180c), and, in Aristotle's logic, it refers to the question whether a given proposition is true or not (e.g., *Top.* 101b28). In this instance, it seems to be a technical philosophical term referring specifically to a dilemma: Cicero's difficulty is that both horns of the dilemma, namely (perceived) outright loyalty to either Pompey or Caesar, were undesirable at this time. Compare also *Att.* 7.9.2.

3.6 Conclusion

My reconstruction of Dicaearchus' argument, prompted by Cicero's allusion to *tanta controversia* between Theophrastus and Dicaearchus in a letter to Atticus (2.16.3), shows that it has a clear Aristotelian precedent: it is premised on humankind's political nature. Dicaearchus presents this as being apparent from the very beginning of humankind's development, in the golden age. Moreover, he advocates that the proper expression of this intrinsic political nature (that is, being a good citizen, involving oneself in public and family life rather than leisured contemplation and intellectual pursuits) is the best life for a human being – now as it has always been. This has a parallel in Cicero's claim in the preface to *De republica* that men are naturally disposed to the political life, and that this sort of life is therefore better than the contemplative (1.1, 1.3, 1.4). Dicaearchus maintains that the active life can be most virtuous without any need of contemplation whatsoever, illustrated by the men of the golden age who had knowledge of virtue and 'just got on with it'. This is also apparent in Cicero's depiction of great Roman men of action such as the elder Cato who 'just got on with it' (1.1), and his insistence that the practical enactment of virtue is superior to mere knowledge of it (1.2).¹⁰⁷ To be sure, Dicaearchus does not rule out the pursuit of the contemplative life entirely, but it is clearly a second-best alternative, all things being equal. Cicero makes the same point in *De republica* (1.1–4, 1.11–13, 3.6).¹⁰⁸

The parallels between Cicero and Dicaearchus are striking and recurrent. Given the connection suggested in *Epistulae ad Atticum* 7.3, the numerous parallels, and Cicero's own admission in *De legibus* 3.14 and *De divinatione* 2.1 that Dicaearchus was a

¹⁰⁷ Note that Cicero's insistence that the practical enactment of virtue is superior to possessing knowledge of it (1.2) also equates with Aristotle's views at *EN* 10.9, 1179a33–b4. On Peripatetic influences in the prologue, see further Frede (1989: 81–4).

¹⁰⁸ Although Cicero maintains that philosophical theory, philosophical works, and the philosopher himself are subordinate to the glory of the practical enactment of such theories and the actual rulers of the state (1.2–3), he admits that those who have not actively ruled have still been of some use via their theoretical treatises (1.12; cf. *Leg.* 3.14); the contemplative life still has some real degree of value, albeit less than the active – it might seem *beatior* to a given individual (and even provide them happiness), but it is none the less second-best (3.6). On the tensions surrounding Cicero's criticisms of philosophy in the preface to *De republica*, see further Blößner (2001); also Schmidt (1973: 292–6), Büchner (1984: 69–94), and Lühken (2003).

source, I conclude that Cicero's advocacy of the political life in *De republica* is heavily influenced by, if not directly derived from, Dicaearchus. This reinforces presently held suspicions and puts the matter, I think, beyond much doubt. But, perhaps more surprisingly, on the basis of our reconstruction it would now appear highly likely that Cicero's vision of the role of philosophy in Roman culture, showcased vividly in the preface to *De republica*, is also taken directly from Dicaearchus.

The preface is, among other things, a sort of manifesto in which Cicero seeks critically to assess and define the nature of philosophy's positive role in Roman society. I suggest that here Cicero, drawing directly on Dicaearchus, fosters the notion of philosophy as a means to return to a sort of Roman golden age, a time in the not too distant past (as the numerous historical examples stress) when the *res publica* functioned properly and Roman men of virtue just got on with it. For Cicero, the current *res publica* under the triumvirs is in a state of degeneration and needs a cure to restore it to health: here the idea is canvassed that philosophy (and Cicero as its Roman mouthpiece) is the best means at present to achieve this aim.¹⁰⁹ Thus, as Cicero stresses, the philosophy he is undertaking is not a leisure pursuit or done simply for its own sake (I.10–13);¹¹⁰ rather it is done as a means of getting the Romans back to a proper way of life epitomised by the illustrious men of the past, who of course do the talking in the dialogue and to whose wisdom and esteem Cicero himself defers at the end of the preface (I.13).¹¹¹ Indeed, as Dicaearchus asserted, philosophical enquiry or theoretical investigation only exists because of problems that have arisen over time in the way men think about

¹⁰⁹ Compare *Fam.* 1.9.18 = 20 SB where strikingly similar sentiments are voiced in an open letter to Lentulus Spinther; chapter 1, sections 1.1 and 1.4 above.

¹¹⁰ In the prefaces to all his philosophical works similar concerns are raised (e.g., *De or.* 1.2–4, *Leg.* 1.5–9, *Fin.* 1.10–12, *DND* 1.6–8, *Acad.* 1.11–12, *Div.* 2.1). For further discussion, see Gildenhard (2007: 8–63) with detailed bibliography.

¹¹¹ He declares: *nec vero nostra quaedam est instituenda nova et a nobis inventa ratio, sed unius aetatis clarissimorum ac sapientissimorum nostrae civitatis virorum disputatio repetenda memoria est*. Note that these Roman spokesmen are all men of action, distinguished by great deeds in the service of the state. Their wisdom and esteem is thus primarily practical. Indeed, Scipio himself attests to this in various places (e.g., 1.22, 1.36, 3.3); although Greek theory is clearly still important as Scipio is made to set out his credentials in this regard as well (e.g., 1.15, 1.34).

3.6 Conclusion

living; originally in the golden age things were fine.¹¹² Likewise, the very existence of philosophical enquiry in Roman culture indicates a problem (it is not something that ordinarily would be done at all, as Cicero frequently insinuates);¹¹³ but, for Cicero, it none the less has a positive role in the present conditions, in helping the Romans see the problems and how to get back to the golden era of the properly functioning *res publica*. This is the curative task Cicero sets himself in his philosophical enterprise.¹¹⁴ Thus, once again, the parallels are striking and recurrent: we can now appreciate that Cicero's vision of philosophy's role at Rome and the character of his own philosophical activities are in all likelihood appropriated from Dicaearchus.

Second, the material in these letters to Atticus offers a different perspective on Cicero's ongoing personal preoccupation with the question of the best life and the relationship between philosophy and political activity. In 59 and again in 50 he confronts the question in the framework of a Peripatetic debate rather than with reference to Plato's political conduct, a practice that we saw in [chapters 1 and 2](#). While the Platonic material offers some principles that allow great flexibility when choosing between the lives, and a specific model for Cicero's political actions (the philosopher involved in practical politics), the Dicaearchan material in particular offers something quite different. It is dogmatic in advocating the political life, and it offers a more general model for political action: the Dicaearchan life of political activity can take many forms including, for example, the traditional Roman roles of senator and upright citizen. The Dicaearchan *praktikos bios* involves the rejection of the life of *otium*, the intellectual *theōrētikos bios* associated with Theophrastus and Aristotle in the Peripatetic tradition, as well as the idle hedonistic life of the Epicurean; and, most crucially, it does not necessarily involve philosophy at all. With this in mind, focusing closely on the exchange with Atticus in 50, it is evident that Cicero hopes to emerge once more as a force in the senate on his return to Italy,

¹¹² See [section 3.3.2](#) above. ¹¹³ See further Hall (1996).

¹¹⁴ And indeed there is plentiful evidence for his efforts in this regard: for instance, the traditional Roman constitution is clearly the basis for the ideal state (*Rep.* 2.3–4).

riding on the back of his successful term as governor of Cilicia and, all going well, a triumph. On the basis of this exchange, traditional modes of Roman political activity – that do not necessarily or customarily involve philosophy – appear to be associated with Dicaearchus’ *praktikos bios* rather than with Plato.¹¹⁵ None the less, the Platonic model of the philosopher active in politics, which we have already seen Cicero adopt at certain times as an alternative means of engaging in Roman politics when traditional avenues of power and influence are problematic, appears to be a specific form that the Dicaearchan *praktikos bios* might take.

This chapter shows that when engaging with debates on the nature and role of philosophy in Roman political life, Cicero’s philosophical resources and critical approaches went beyond the Academy narrowly conceived and beyond Plato, however influential his works – and especially the Platonic letters – undoubtedly were in this respect. The following two chapters further underline this wide-ranging approach.

¹¹⁵ This is also clearly evident in letters to Atticus from April 59 BC, particularly 2.16.3; see [chapter 1, section 1.2](#).

CHAPTER 4

A STOIC LECTURE: *EPISTULAE AD FAMILIARES* 9.22

In this chapter I consider a different aspect of Cicero's philosophical practice, namely his use of Stoic philosophy in letters of 46 BC, in early April of which year Caesar defeated the vestiges of the republican forces in Africa and assumed essentially unrivalled power at Rome. The prevalence of philosophy in the correspondence from 46 is especially striking: one can detect philosophical material in letters to Marcus Terentius Varro (*Fam.* 9.1.2, 9.2.5, 9.3, 9.4, 9.5.2, 9.6.4–5, 9.7.2 = 175–81 SB),¹ Lucius Papirius Paetus (9.15.3–4, 9.16.5–6, 9.17.1–3, 9.18, 9.20, 9.22, 9.25, 9.26 = 114, 189–91, 193, 195–7 SB), Mescinius Rufus (5.21.2–4 = 182 SB), Volumnius Eutrapelus (7.33.2 = 192 SB), Manius Curius (7.28.2–3 = 200 SB), Servius Sulpicius Rufus (4.3.2–4, 4.4.4–5 = 202–3 SB), Marcus Fabius Gallus (7.26.1 = 210 SB), Gnaeus Domitius Ahenobarbus (6.22.2 = 221 SB), Lucius Lucceius (5.13.1–2 = 201 SB), Trebianus (6.10b.1–3 = 222 SB), Nigidius Figulus (4.13.4 = 225 SB), and Marcus Marius (7.3.1, 4 = 183 SB).²

This chapter is centred on an analysis of perhaps the most technical philosophical letter in the extant correspondence, *Epistulae ad familiares* 9.22 (= 189 SB),³ which I date to February or March 46 BC⁴ and which is in the form of a Stoic lecture (*Stoica schola*) on the proposition that 'the wise man will

¹ Unless otherwise indicated, all references in this chapter are to Cicero's *Epistulae ad familiares*.

² There is useful discussion of some of these letters in Kumaniecki (1957) and Griffin (1995: 332–42); Demmel (1962), on the correspondence to Paetus; Leach (1999), on the correspondence to Varro and Paetus.

³ Wendt (1929), Demmel (1962: 219–45), and Shackleton Bailey (1977–8: 2.330–4) offer useful philological commentaries and analysis of the letter, each with interestingly different perspectives, but they are less helpful regarding the philosophical dimensions.

⁴ The date of the letter is very important for my argument in this chapter and so deserves some further comment. Shackleton Bailey (1977–8: 2.331) dates the letter to some time between 46 and 44 BC. Following Wendt (1929), I date the letter to 46 on the basis of its

call a spade a spade' (ὁ σοφὸς εὐθυρρημονήσει, 9.22.5) addressed to Papirius Paetus, a young friend who was an *eques*, a professed Epicurean (9.25),⁵ and something of an intellectual and socialite, and who had avoided close involvement in the civil war.⁶ Scholars have, in general, been rather underwhelmed by it. Leach describes it as 'a mock-learned letter'⁷ and Shackleton Bailey declares that 'the whole thing is a *jeu d'esprit*'.⁸ No doubt the letter is full of wit and humour, and at first glance it may appear nothing more than a clever discourse on a frivolous matter, quite dissociated from political concerns.⁹ But, I shall argue, it is in fact a carefully composed philosophical work in which Cicero addresses a philosophical

very close similarity to the *Paradoxa Stoicorum* (see pages 179–80 below), composed in the same year, and the presence of similar themes in other letters to Paetus from 46 (*Fam.* 9.15–17, 9.19–20, 9.23, 9.26 = 190, 193–8 SB). I place the letter in February or March because of the reference to the Kalends of March at the end of the letter (9.22.5). The conjectured date of 44, favoured by Demmel (1962: 220–1, 239–43) is supported by the similarity of the material to a passage in the *De officiis* (1.128–9). It is of course extremely difficult to resolve the issue firmly one way or another through appeal to textual parallels. I suggest, however, that the similarities with the *Paradoxa Stoicorum* are more striking than with the material on obscenity in the *De officiis*, in which Cicero reports a significantly different Stoic argument (as I discuss in section 4.2 below), and that on the basis of this criterion 46 is the more probable date. In any case, throughout this chapter I work on the premiss that the letter was written in 46, and what claims I make depend on it.

⁵ On Paetus' philosophical credentials, see Castner (1991: 43–4) and Benferhat (2005: 170–2).

⁶ There are twelve letters extant between the two, between 50 and 43 BC (*Fam.* 9.15–26 = 114, 188–98, 362 SB). They seem to have been acquainted since the 60s (*Att.* 1.20.7 = 20 SB, 2.1.4 = 21 SB).

⁷ Leach (1999: 169).

⁸ Shackleton Bailey (1977–8: 2.331).

⁹ To be sure, Cicero attests explicitly in some of his letters to Paetus' escaping from or avoiding political concerns (e.g., *Fam.* 9.20.1–3 = 193 SB, 9.17.1 = 195 SB, 9.15.3–5 = 196 SB), and often he discusses seemingly frivolous or inconsequential matters in a jocular vein (e.g., *Fam.* 9.16.8–9 = 190 SB, 9.18.3–4 = 191 SB, 9.20.1–3, 9.26 = 197 SB). It might therefore seem reasonable to suppose that this letter is just another example of such bonhomie, albeit a striking one. But it must be stressed that a strong undercurrent runs throughout all these letters to Paetus: the very fact Cicero is discussing such apparently banal matters, often with reference to Caesarian figures with whom he is now associating socially, in itself says something about the dire state of political life (cf *Fam.* 15.16.3 = 215 SB, 15.18.1 = 213 SB, discussed on pages 19–25 above). An excellent example of Cicero's practice in this regard is his thinly veiled comment on Caesar's autocratic rule: *tenuicula apparatu significas Balbum fuisse contentum. hoc videris dicere, cum reges tam sint continentes, multo magis consularis esse oportere* (9.19.1 = 194 SB). Additionally, as we shall see in this chapter, a crucial tactic of Cicero's navigation of and commentary on the current social environment is his exploitation of indirect and subtle modes of drawing attention to and discussing frankly serious matters.

4.1 *Verecundia* and *libertas loquendi*

debate between the Stoics and the Academy surrounding free and frank speech in order to highlight and resolve ethical and political issues that have become problematic in the new socio-political environment under Caesar.

4.1 *Verecundia* and *libertas loquendi*

Cicero begins the letter as follows:

amo verecundiam vel potius libertatem loquendi. atqui hoc Zenoni placuit, homini mehercule acuto, etsi Academiae nostrae cum eo magna rixa est. sed, ut dico, placet Stoicis suo quamque rem nomine appellare. (Cicero, *Epistulae ad familiares* 9.22.1)

I love modesty or rather freedom of speech. And this found favour with Zeno, a clever man by Hercules, even if our Academy has a great fight with him. But, as I say, it finds favour with the Stoics to call everything by its proper name.

Note that I have changed the punctuation of the first sentence from that of Shackleton Bailey. He offers *amo verecundiam! – vel potius libertatem loquendi*. And he translates the sentence: ‘I love your modesty – or rather your freedom of speech’. This assumes an unexpressed *tuam*; but there is no need to assume that Cicero is talking about Paetus’ actions in this passage (it is only at 9.22.2 that we are made aware that Cicero is replying to Paetus’ use of the word *mentula*). Indeed, Shackleton Bailey is confused by the first line of this letter. He notes that ‘the sentence is generally regarded as corrupt’ and he suggests that Cicero added the words *vel potius libertatem loquendi* ‘(unless they are a gloss imported from the margin) to make it quite clear what *verecundia* really meant’.¹⁰ Purser obelises the phrase *vel potius libertatem loquendi* in the Oxford Classical Text.¹¹ But it seems reasonable to accept that Cicero did write *vel potius libertatem loquendi*. There are numerous examples of Cicero using the phrase *vel potius* to clarify exactly what he means, or to change the emphasis of what he is saying, or to focus attention on a particular aspect of something

¹⁰ Shackleton Bailey (1977–8: 2.331).

¹¹ Purser (1901). He does not list any alternative manuscript readings in the *apparatus criticus*, offering only some speculative (and unconvincing) emendations on the part of modern editors.

general (e.g., *Att.* 5.7.1 = 100 SB, 9.10.2 = 168 SB, *Fam.* 6.6.13 = 234 SB, 6.22.3 = 221 SB, 9.6.2 = 181 SB). We seem to have another instance here.

To be sure, we can gather the general sense of what Cicero is saying at the start of the letter. This opening gambit conveys Cicero's attitudes regarding two important notions that concern the negotiation of social interactions: *verecundia* and *libertas loquendi*. *Verecundia* is a difficult term to translate, but it conveys the feelings of modesty, knowing what is required of oneself, due respect, and politeness.¹² With specific reference to speech, it means employing proper or appropriate language when dealing with others, depending on the relative social standings and the social environment in which the transaction takes place. *Libertas loquendi* denotes freedom of speech – the freedom to speak frankly, to be outspoken – and it captures the sense of the Greek παρρησία. It is a mode of discourse that is especially appropriate between true friends (Cic. *Amic.* 44, 88–100),¹³ and a distinguished ex-consul might feel confident adopting it in political concerns as a matter of routine.¹⁴ The relationship between *verecundia* and *libertas loquendi* is the key issue: at certain times *libertas loquendi* could be an appropriate expression of *verecundia*; but, on the other hand, clearly at times there may be conflict, when the demands of *verecundia* mean that one should not speak freely and frankly. For instance, Hall highlights how *verecundia* in epistolary communication between Roman aristocrats often required the maintenance of what he labels 'polite fictions'.¹⁵ Cicero draws attention to the relationship between *verecundia* and *libertas loquendi*, with its potential for conflict, in the very first line of the letter.

¹² Kaster (2005: 15) defines it as follows: '*verecundia* animates the art of knowing your proper place in every social transaction and basing your behavior on that knowledge'. He also notes (17–19) that *verecundia* embodies a concern to avoid offence when navigating social space. There is detailed discussion of *verecundia* at 13–27, 61–5.

¹³ See further Habinek (1990); also Konstan (1997: 103–8) and Konstan *et al.* (1998: 3–5).

¹⁴ See Leach (1999: 154). *Verecundia* would allow such a distinguished person to speak freely and frankly. The citizens' supposed right to παρρησία in the political institutions of Athenian democracy is a useful comparison; see further Bonner (1933: 67–85).

¹⁵ Hall (2009: 8–12, 37–8).

4.1 *Verecundia* and *libertas loquendi*

Indeed, Cicero declares his love of *verecundia*, to be understood – the point of the *vel potius* phrase – in the specific sense of freedom of speech (which is a particular form that *verecundia* might take), and he then moves on to say that this found favour with Zeno of Citium, the founder of the Stoic school. However, the Academy, to which Cicero himself professes to adhere, disagrees on this issue. Cicero alludes to this disagreement again at the end of the letter:

habes scholam Stoicam: ὁ σοφὸς εὐθυπρημονήσει. quam multa ex uno verbo tuo! te adversus me omnia audere gratum est; ego servo et servabo (sic enim adsuevi) Platonis verecundiam. itaque tectis verbis ea ad te scripsi quae apertissimis agunt Stoici. sed illi etiam crepitus aiunt aequae liberos ac ructus esse oportere. honorem igitur Kalendis Martiis. (Cicero, *Epistulae ad familiares* 9.22.5)

You have a Stoic lecture: the wise man will call a spade a spade.¹⁶ How many words from one of yours! It is pleasing that you dare everything towards me. I retain and will retain (for thus I am accustomed) the modesty of Plato. And so I have written to you with guarded words on topics which the Stoics deal with most openly. But they also say that we should break wind and belch with equal freedom. Therefore, let us respect the Kalends of March.

The beginning and end of the letter frame an ethical problem that Cicero himself is obliged to confront: should one speak politely and with due respect or should one speak freely and frankly, when it is impossible to do both at the same time? This is addressed within a philosophical dispute between Zeno and the Academy ('Plato' in 9.22.5 appears to be equivalent to 'the Academy' in 9.22.1), who offer different views on what is the appropriate course of action: the Stoics favour stubborn adherence to free speech in all situations, whereas the Academy favours tailoring one's speech to fit the circumstances (given the demands of *verecundia* at times free speech will be appropriate but at other times not – one has to weigh *libertas loquendi* against the circumstances). In this letter, even though he says he loves *libertas*

¹⁶ Following Shackleton Bailey I have translated εὐθυπρημονεῖν 'to call a spade a spade'. By this phrase I hope to convey the ideas of 'speaking the truth frankly and freely (particularly at the expense of overstepping a social boundary)' and 'speaking the truth clearly, accurately describing things as they are'. I show in [section 4.2](#) below why both notions are significant.

loquendi and ideally in Stoic fashion would like not to have to mind his words whatever the circumstances, Cicero ultimately professes to adhere to the more nuanced Academic position.

The beginning and end of the letter frame the general debate. However, the letter is centred on a specific issue: Paetus' use of the obscene sexual term *mentula* in an earlier letter.¹⁷ Some way into the letter Cicero writes:

caudam antiqui 'penem' vocabant, ex quo est propter similitudinem 'penicillus'; at hodie penis est in obscenis. at vero Piso ille Frugi in annalibus suis queritur adulescentis 'peni deditos' esse. quod tu in epistula appellas suo nomine ille tectius 'penem'; sed quia multi, factum est tam obscenum quam id verbum quo tu usus es. (Cicero, *Epistulae ad familiares* 9.22.2)

The ancients used to call a tail 'a penis', from which there is 'paintbrush'¹⁸ on account of the similarity; but today 'penis' is obscene. But in truth Piso Frugi in his *Annals* complains that young men 'are devoted to the penis'. What you call in your letter by its proper name he more reservedly calls 'penis'; but because many others did the same, it became just as obscene a word as the one which you used.

Cicero himself avoids using the word *mentula* here and in the letter as a whole,¹⁹ but it is clear that this is the term that Paetus used in his letter and that *mentula* is the starting point for Cicero's lecture on obscenity.²⁰ The precise context of Paetus' use of the word is uncertain and there are a number of possibilities. It might simply have been bandied about carelessly by Paetus, thereby giving Cicero the chance to admonish him tongue-in-cheek with a mock-learned lecture; Paetus could have been obscene deliberately since that was just his style, even when corresponding with grantees like Cicero;²¹ he might have been making a specific point or making a report to Cicero on an actual happening for which writing *mentula* was unavoidable. We cannot of course be certain one way or another. However, I would like to entertain one

¹⁷ On *mentula* as an obscene term, see Adams (1990: 9–12).

¹⁸ The jokes in the Latin do not translate readily into English, but I have opted for literal translations.

¹⁹ I discuss the significance of this in [section 4.3](#) below.

²⁰ See Shackleton Bailey (1977–8: 2.332).

²¹ Cicero often makes a point of commenting on Paetus' exuberance or brazenness (e.g., *Fam.* 9.20.1 = 193 SB, 9.15.2 = 196 SB).

4.1 *Verecundia* and *libertas loquendi*

distinct possibility that takes seriously the connotations the term *mentula* held with respect to Caesar.

As well as being an obscene sexual term, *mentula* is a derogatory term used famously by the poet Catullus in the 50s as a nickname for Caesar's close comrade Mamurra and to lampoon the sexual extravagance associated with Caesar and the first triumvirate (29, 94, 105, 114, 115).²² Consider in particular the following extract from poem 29:

eone nomine, imperator unice,
fuisti in ultima occidentis insula,
ut ista vestra diffututa mentula
ducenties comesset aut trecenties? 15
quid est alid sinistra liberalitas?

(Catullus, *Carmen* 29.12–16)

Was it not on this account, one and only general, that you were in the farthest island of the West, so that worn-out prick of yours [Mamurra]²³ might devour two or three hundred? What is a perverse gift, if not this?

In particular, note that in poem 29 Catullus portrays Mamurra and Caesar as homosexual lovers (he does the same in poem 57): Catullus is referring to Caesar when he twice addresses *cinaedus Romulus* ('sodomite Romulus'; lines 5 and 10).²⁴ Mamurra being the *mentula* in the relationship clearly casts Caesar in the passive role: indeed, the poem as a whole is a challenge to Caesar, demanding how he, who is supposed to be the one in charge, can let Mamurra get away with so much pillaging, both financial and sexual, not only of others but also of himself. The fame of Catullus' smears can be seen in the exception that Caesar took to a poem about Mamurra that inflicted on him *perpetua stigmata* (Suet. *Div. Iul.* 73).²⁵ A deliberate allusion by Paetus to Catullus'

²² For further discussion of these poems and the motif, see, for example, Scott (1971), Harvey (1979), Thomson (1997: 278–82, 551–4), and Deuling (1999).

²³ Catullus refers to Mamurra by name in line 3. ²⁴ See Deuling (1999: 191).

²⁵ Suetonius' report is quite specific and worth quoting in full: *Valerium Catullum, a quo sibi versiculis de Mamurra perpetua stigmata imposita non dissimulaverat, satis facientem eadem die adhibuit cenae hospitioque patris eius, sicut consuerat, ut perseveravit*. Thomson (1997: 278) argues that this most likely refers to poem 29 rather than 57, which also depicts Caesar and Mamurra as homosexual lovers. Note that Catullus himself alludes to Caesar's anger over his verse in poem 54. For further discussion of

use of *mentula* is not made explicit by Cicero in his letter;²⁶ but we might well expect both Paetus and Cicero (as well as others) to recognise it or at least be aware of the connotations that *mentula* had with respect to Caesar and his comrades.

I propose that we take this intertextual connection very seriously. Cicero can now be read as making the following point in *Epistulae ad familiares* 9.22: even if it might be a true and accurate description to call not only the penis but also Caesar and his allies such as Mamurra *mentula*, this involves disregard for the offence it might cause and the repercussions that will follow. For Catullus in the socio-political conditions of the 50s there was considerable scope for freedom of speech (including obscene and offensive speech), and his frank speaking with regard to Caesar and his close allies was an ultimately safe, tolerable, and rewarding course of action.²⁷ However, in 46 BC there were understandable anxieties (particularly on the part of those who had sided with Pompey) over how to act in the new socio-political conditions under Caesarian dictatorship:²⁸ the limits of *libertas loquendi* and *verecundia* were unclear. Paetus' use of the provocative term *mentula* raises this particular issue; and, I suggest, in *Epistulae ad familiares* 9.22 Cicero addresses it in the context of a philosophical debate between the Stoics and the Academy.²⁹

Despite highlighting his own preference for the *verecundia* of Plato at the end of the letter, throughout the letter as a whole Cicero focuses on the Stoic position in favour of *libertas loquendi*, in particular their argument that there is no obscene or indecent

issues surrounding allegations of homosexual sexual misbehaviour, see Williams (2010: esp. 191–213).

²⁶ Although Cicero of course never mentions Catullus by name anywhere in his extant works.

²⁷ Despite lampooning Caesar in his poems, Catullus seems to have remained on cordial terms with him (Suet. *Div. Iul.* 73).

²⁸ Such anxieties pervade Cicero's correspondence with defeated republican supporters now returning to Italy (e.g., *Fam.* 4.3–4 = 202–3 SB, 4.7–10 = 229–31, 233 SB, 6.22 = 221 SB, 7.28 = 200 SB). Leach (1999: 150–77) offers a useful discussion of Cicero's concerns with social etiquette in the letters of this period; she does not, however, emphasise the importance of philosophy with respect to the issue.

²⁹ I discuss in detail the letter's commentary on particular contemporary social and political issues at the end of section 4.3 and throughout section 4.4 below.

4.2 Zeno: why the wise man will call a spade a spade

language (*sic enim disserunt, nihil esse obscenum, nihil turpe dictu*, 9.22.1–2) which leads to the conclusion that ‘the wise man will call a spade a spade’ (9.22.5). In the following sections I show how in the letter Cicero cleverly puts into practice the Academic position while presenting a technical Stoic argument, thereby making a point about how nuanced Academic practice can achieve the same effects as blunt Stoic practice without upsetting sensitive social boundaries.³⁰

4.2 Zeno’s argument for why the wise man will call a spade a spade

First, let us evaluate the Stoic argument that Cicero presents in the letter. We do not know Cicero’s source, nor do we know the argument’s original Zenonian context.³¹ A possible candidate is a work on semantics such as Zeno’s *On Signs* (DL 7.4). On the other hand, perhaps the argument appeared in a work concerned with social and political philosophy, such as Zeno’s *Republic*, which was said to have been written ‘on the dog’s tail’ (DL 7.4) since it advocated teachings associated closely with Cynicism.³² In the *De officiis*, a treatise concerned predominantly with issues of ethics and social and political philosophy, Cicero himself suggests that this same argument is forwarded by the Cynics and those Stoics who are practically Cynics (I.128).

Indeed, the directive to speak freely even at the expense of social propriety appears distinctly Cynic.³³ Cynics were associated closely with freedom of speech (παρρησία), particularly that which flew in the face of social boundaries and conventional

³⁰ This is in opposition to Wendt (1929). To be sure, Cicero does not present a formal argument for the Academic position, like he does for the Stoic, nor does he offer any detailed criticism of the Stoic argument. As we shall see, Cicero’s mode of argument is subtler than this.

³¹ Shackleton Bailey (1977–8: 2.330) notes that ‘no earlier treatment of the subject survives’.

³² See further Schofield (1991: esp. 10–13); also Baldry (1959).

³³ Note that the connotation of speaking at the expense of propriety, being outspoken to the point of overstepping a social boundary, is central to εὐθυρημονεῖν. This connotation of εὐθυρημονεῖν is particularly apparent in a letter Trebonius writes to Cicero in 44 BC (*Fam.* 12.16.3 = 328 SB).

norms of conduct.³⁴ Diogenes the Cynic is associated with a number of anecdotes to this effect (e.g., DL 6.43–6). Furthermore, Clement of Alexandria associates εὐθυρρημονεῖν with the Cynic Crates of Thebes in the context of παρρησία (*Strom.* 2.20.121.2), and he also mentions Zeno (who was a student of Crates) by name in the same passage.³⁵ It is widely acknowledged that Cynicism heavily influenced Zeno (most strikingly, he said that the wise man will act like a Cynic; DL 7.121; cf 7.3–4).³⁶ On the basis of this evidence, it seems fair to say that the argument that the wise man will call a spade a spade is Cynic in origin.

In any case, *Epistulae ad familiares* 9.22 is the most detailed piece of evidence we have for the argument, and we get the impression from Cicero's letter that Zeno's view is the standard Stoic position on the subject.³⁷ Following Cicero's account in the letter, the argument can be presented succinctly as follows:

1. If there is something shocking in obscenity, it must either be in the matter or in the word; there are no other alternatives (*nam, si quod sit in obscenitate flagitium, id aut in re esse aut in verbo; nihil esse tertium*, 9.22.1).
2. It is not in the matter (*in re non est*, 9.22.1).
3. It is not in the word (*multo minus in verbis*, 9.22.2).
4. Therefore, there is nothing shocking in obscenity; there is no such thing as obscene or disgraceful language.
5. Therefore, one should call a thing by its proper, rightful name (*suum nomen*) – there is no need for euphemism; the sage will call a spade a spade.

First (in (2)), it is argued that the shocking quality or property does not lie in the matter itself, because the matter, such as adulterous sex or incest, can be represented or signified by different words, not all of which are obscene or disgraceful (9.22.1). Thus, that which is shocking in obscenity does not lie in the matter: if it did,

³⁴ See Sluiter (2005: 157–63). Cicero himself notes at *De officiis* 1.148 that the Cynic system is inimical to *verecundia*.

³⁵ See Aubert (2007: 59).

³⁶ For detailed discussion of the relationship between Cynicism and Stoicism, see Goulet-Cazé (2003) with further bibliography.

³⁷ In *De officiis* 1.126–32, on the other hand, we get the impression that the standard Stoic view is different, if we presume that Cicero is drawing on Panaetius in this section, as Dyck (1996: 299–303) maintains.

4.2 Zeno: why the wise man will call a spade a spade

then the matter would always be obscene or indecent whichever *verbum* is used to signify it; but evidently this is not the case (*vides igitur, cum eadem res sit, quia verba non sint, nihil videri turpe*, 9.22.2). Second (in (3)), that which is shocking in obscenity does not lie in the word either, because the word merely denotes or signifies the matter, which is not shocking or obscene: *si enim quod verbo significatur id turpe non est, verbum, quod significat, turpe esse non potest* ('For if that which is signified by a word is not indecent, the word, which signifies it, cannot be indecent', 9.22.2). There is an important assumption here regarding the relationship of the word to the matter: the word appropriates the moral value of the thing that it signifies. Thus, since the matter is not obscene, the word is not obscene either; and, because a euphemistic word signifying, for example, incest is not obscene or indecent, this implies that the matter it signifies is not obscene or indecent either. It follows that there is no shocking obscenity (9.22.2).

Although this Stoic argument is very typical of Zeno (cf esp. Plut. *Stoic. rep.* 1034e), at first it appears somewhat strange and unconvincing. It seems to be valid, but it is not obviously sound. The problem appears to be in the reasons provided for thinking that that which is shocking in obscenity is neither *in re* nor *in verbo*. Rejection of the *in verbo* option is clearly dependent on the prior rejection of the *in re* option, and it is a fair step if we accept that words appropriate the moral value of the things that they signify. But why this should be the case and why the *in re* option should be rejected on the basis that the matter can be signified euphemistically are not clear at all. In order to analyse this part of the argument properly, we need to consider the semantic theory underpinning it.

Despite the colloquial and humorous tone of the letter, the argument is played out in technical terms. Cicero employs Latin terms that correspond directly with Stoic postulates concerning the nature of language.³⁸ *Verbum* refers to the word as well as the

³⁸ Note that Cicero engages with Stoic semantics in later philosophical treatises (e.g., *DND* 3.24, 3.62, *Off.* 1.23), but this letter is an early indication of his familiarity with the material.

actual sound (*sonum*) of it being articulated in speech – this is the thing doing the signifying; *res* refers to the thing in itself (πρᾶγμα), independent of the word but signified or represented by it. The proper name (*suum nomen*) refers to that which the *res* possesses peculiar or specific to itself. The possessive pronoun conveys the notion that things by nature have proper names, whereas our *verba* (what speakers use to signify and communicate) are of a different order: ideally they correspond to or capture the *nomina*, but they might not.³⁹

We might then identify a problem for the argument that Cicero provides for the rejection of obscenity *in re*. The problem might be put as follows: the argument concludes that since the *res* can be signified non-obscenely, the *res* itself is not obscene. But this implicitly and illegitimately assumes that there is always some *natural* connection between the *res* and the various words that may be used to signify it. To be sure, such a natural connection is clear in the case of the thing's proper name and the words formed from that proper name. In the case of euphemism, however, the word being used to signify the *res* in question might come from a different etymological tree – in which case it has a different 'genetic' history since its natural connection is ultimately to a different *res* altogether (for example, the word *penis* naturally derives from the *res* 'tail' instead of the male sexual organ). The problem seems to be that there are surely two different types of signification, one reliant on a natural connection and another reliant on convention. For instance, take the case of the word *penis*: it is not connected by nature to the thing it signifies euphemistically (the *res*: the male sexual organ), but has been appropriated from another etymological tree (presumably it is connected by nature to an altogether separate *res*: tail); the word *penis* signifies the male sexual organ only by virtue of convention. But the possibility of referring to the penis with a word that is only

³⁹ Note that in these instances we might still be able to understand what *res* the *verbum* refers to, as in the case of *penis* in the example offered by Cicero in the cited passage above, although there will in these cases be some degree of ambiguity (one could be referring to a 'tail').

conventionally applied to it is not such compelling ground for thinking that the *res* itself is not obscene.

The argument therefore may leave open the possibility that things might be obscene despite being represented euphemistically, since the proper names corresponding to them by nature (the use of which is avoided by euphemism) might still be obscene.⁴⁰ This possibility is not explicitly addressed. The results of this first argument rejecting the *in re* option are then used to reject the *in verbo* option. To be sure, it is reasonable to say that if things are never obscene then words are never obscene since all words ultimately have a natural connection to some thing; but that things are never obscene has not been established, at least not in the argument offered by Cicero. It is clear, however, from 9.22.1–2 that Zeno and the Stoics think that it is true that things are never obscene by nature. Cicero has not given a very persuasive argument in this letter, but the Stoics might have offered alternatives.⁴¹

Despite reservations about its soundness, let us resume tracing Cicero's exposition of the Stoic argument in the letter. It is undeniable that people find certain words and matters indecent or obscene and are shocked by them.⁴² Cicero argues that people should not be shocked by such things (*viden igitur nihil esse nisi ineptias, turpitudinem nec in verbo esse nec in re,*

⁴⁰ The problem is most apparent when Cicero writes: '*anum*' *appellat alieno nomine; cur non suo potius? si turpe est, ne alieno quidem; si non est, suo potius* (9.22.2). If the proper name (*suum nomen*) is indecent, thereby making the *res* to which it is naturally connected indecent, this does not mean necessarily that the euphemistic word (*alienum nomen*) signifying the indecent *res* must also be indecent (and so should not be used either), since it need not share a natural connection to the indecent *res*: the euphemistic word's moral value comes from whatever *res* it is naturally connected to, not the thing it signifies by convention.

⁴¹ Perhaps the Stoics might have claimed that since the world itself is intrinsically good (e.g., Epict. *Disc.* 1.6) nothing could possibly be obscene by nature. This would require one to think of obscenity as something akin to an evil. In contrast, in the *De officiis* (1.126–32) Cicero suggests that the Stoics acknowledge that certain things are in fact naturally obscene, such as the genitals and bodily organs. Importantly, however, such things are necessary by nature (they perform necessary functions and are not evils) and, what is more, they are carefully hidden away by nature (under skin or in private places) on account of their (unavoidable) obscene nature.

⁴² The Stoic view is surprising and runs counter to universal opinion; hence it is one of the Stoic παράδοξα (cf Cic. *Parad.* 4), as Demmel (1962: 224) notes. There are no earlier records of this paradox.

itaque nusquam esse?, 9.22.3). He provides a host of everyday examples that demonstrate that that which makes something obscene or disgraceful is really dependent on contingent considerations. For instance, in a particular culture certain fashions may make a previously proper word obscene, such as is the case with *penis* (9.22.2). The articulation of certain words that are proper in Latin may be obscene in Greek and vice versa, such as is the case with βίβη (9.22.3). Indeed, certain actions may be obscene in certain contexts but not in others (e.g., breaking wind: 9.22.4). But all these instances of obscenity and indecency are clearly contingent; it is not necessary that they be obscene at all. Zeno and the Stoics are not concerned with these cultural matters but rather with what we can call ‘natural obscenity’ – properties in nature that might make something obscene. It is accepted that if something is ‘naturally obscene’ it is necessary that it will be judged obscene by all people in all cases, regardless of cultural peculiarities, which clearly is not the case in the everyday examples Cicero provides in the letter.⁴³ If we are to live in accordance with what is natural we should reject these cultural impositions and call things by their rightful name. If people take offence from the word or matter, then they are simply wrong – they are mistaking culture for nature. Thus, as Cicero insinuates frequently in the letter to Paetus, Zeno and the Stoics maintain that burping, farting, incest, and the like are all acceptable.

Now, there appear to be three contexts for the maxim that the wise man will call a spade a spade: in Stoic semantic theory, in rhetorical precepts, and in their ethical and political philosophy. These three spheres are interrelated, but it is useful to treat each in turn. In this way we can see more clearly three possible ways of interpreting the maxim’s importance in Stoic thought.

First, Aubert notes that the maxim resonates with the Stoics’ advocacy of a plain, laconic style in their rhetorical teachings: by calling a spade a spade one speaks clearly, to the point, and

⁴³ This is a parallel to the argument that if a *res* is obscene it will be whichever *verbum* it has. Although we have seen that this holds good only so long as there is a natural connection between the *verbum* and the *res/nomen*.

4.2 Zeno: why the wise man will call a spade a spade

avoids ambiguity.⁴⁴ The importance of the maxim here is supported by the very few other instances of the term εὐθυρημονεῖν in a distinctive Stoic context (SE *M.* 2.23, 2.54; Marc. Aur. *Med.* 11.6). In these texts the ideas of plainness of speech and straight-talking, voicing the cold hard truth without obfuscating panegyric or flattery, are to the fore. Second, with regard to semantics, the maxim suggests that when speaking the sage can align correctly at all times the *res*, its proper name, and the *verbum*. This involves great care in speech (hence the plain speaking, laconic, to-the-point rhetorical style) so as to impart the truth, to describe or signify nature accurately to others: there is a one-to-one correspondence where speech signifies nature perfectly.⁴⁵ Third, with regard to ethics, in *Epistulae ad familiares* 9.22 Cicero allies calling a spade a spade closely to freedom of speech – indeed, it appears a basic mode of freedom of speech to be able to be outspoken and call things as they are, not to lie or obfuscate things. As we have seen, following Zeno this strictly involves the rejection of social convention if there is a conflict between nature and convention; it means ignoring or actively rejecting concern for social approbation, offence, and other such things.

Now, the maxim implies that calling a spade a spade is the proper thing to do. However, if the sage does not do so, then that implies that he has made a correct decision not to do so (for the sage is never wrong). What would the motivations for such a choice be, given what we have seen thus far? In the *De officiis* (1.126–32) Cicero argues at length that one should avoid obscenity in speech and deportment.⁴⁶ He presents a detailed argument that that which is shocking in obscenity lies both *in re* and *in verbo* not by convention but by nature; thus, by avoiding obscene language and matters one acts in accordance with nature. However, even if we accept Zeno's argument that there is no

⁴⁴ Aubert (2007); there is direct discussion of εὐθυρημονεῖν on 58–61. For further discussion of Stoic rhetorical theory, see Atherton (1988 and 1993: 473–82).

⁴⁵ As noted above, the ability of others (the non-wise) to appreciate the perfect signification is a separate issue.

⁴⁶ Here Cicero is in all likelihood drawing heavily on the Stoic Panaetius; see further Dyck (1996: 17–29). Note, however, that similar ideas appear in different contexts, such as *De finibus* 5.47, which are clearly not Panaetian or even strictly Stoic. For the extent to which this aspect of the *De officiis* represents Cicero's own ideas, see Brunt (1973: 26–33).

‘natural obscenity’, perhaps there are still proper concerns for social approbation and harmony that need to be taken into account in speech and deportment. This is supported by the fact that, for the Stoics, according to Cicero (*Off.* 1.12, 1.50, *Fin.* 2.45, *Rep.* 3.3), speech is not just a descriptive tool but also, in the words of Allen, ‘the bond fashioned by nature to unite human beings in society’.⁴⁷ This is in keeping with Cicero’s argument in the *De officiis*, which rests on the notion that there is a natural concern among humans to foster the approbation of others and cement social bonds (1.126),⁴⁸ for which proper speech and deportment (the avoidance of offence and indecency) are the means provided by nature.⁴⁹ Thus far we have been assuming that language is essentially a descriptive tool, and this seems to be the key notion in Zeno’s argument in *Epistulae ad familiares* 9.22, but this social role of language may complicate things.⁵⁰

In the next section I show how Cicero reconciles these two competing concerns, speaking truly about reality in Stoic fashion while at the same time avoiding offence and the transgression of social boundaries, via his own stylistic and argumentative practice.

4.3 Academic versus Stoic practice

In the final section of *Epistulae ad familiares* 9.22 Cicero claims that he has avoided both obscenity and open free and frank speech throughout his exposition of the Stoic argument: *ego servo et servabo (sic enim adsuevi) Platonis verecundiam. itaque tectis verbis ea ad te scripsi quae apertissimis agunt Stoici* (‘I retain and will retain (for thus I am accustomed) the polite modesty of Plato. And so I have written to you with guarded words on topics which the Stoics deal with most openly’, 9.22.5). Here Cicero is drawing

⁴⁷ Allen (2005: 27).

⁴⁸ Thus people are naturally keen to act in accordance with *verecundia*.

⁴⁹ Indeed, there is some evidence that Chrysippus stressed the importance of adopting a fitting deportment when speaking frankly, which suggests a real concern with social approbation, even if just for the purposes of persuasion (Plut. *Stoic. rep.* 1047a–b).

⁵⁰ Perhaps Zeno might argue simply that accurate description when communicating with others is in fact the most important thing for human communities.

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Paetus' attention to the fact that he has carefully presented the Stoic case in an Academic fashion, in a manner befitting the *verecundia* of Plato. He is making the point that one can achieve the same goal or effects as the Stoics without the problems involved in calling a spade a spade, indeed while actively maintaining appropriate social mores; thus, in his own letter Cicero showcases or exemplifies in practice the Academic or Platonic alternative to the blunt Stoic option which Paetus in his own letter unwittingly exemplified.

Cicero has talked *tectis verbis* about topics that the Stoics treat most openly by relying heavily on indirect modes of signification, especially humour and innuendo. Some examples will suffice to show this. First, consider a verbal trick: *quid quod vulgo dicitur 'cum nos te volumus convenire?' num obscenum est?* ('How about what is said by the common man, "when we wanted to meet you"? Is it obscene?', 9.22.2). The humour lies in pronouncing *cum nos* out loud as *cunnos*, thereby stating an obscene sexual term. Note, however, that Cicero has not written an obscene word and the perceived indecency relies on some presumption on the part of the reader. Take this joke that relies on knowledge of Greek: *cum loquimur 'terni', nihil flagiti dicimus; at cum 'bini', obscenum est? 'Graecis quidem' inquires* ('When we say "thrice", we say nothing shameful; but when we say "twice", is it obscene? "Certainly to a Greek", you will say', 9.22.3). The Greek βινεῖ is a provocatively obscene word referring to sex. However, the Latin is not obscene and any perceived indecency requires the reader to make the connection. Again, consider the following: *'ruta' et 'menta' recte utrumque. volo mentam pusillam ita appellare ut 'rutulam': non licet* ("Rue" and "mint" are both respectable. I want to name a little mint in the same way as "a little rue": it is not permitted', 9.22.3). The sexually explicit allusion to *mentula* is clear, but Cicero has not said anything indecent in this brief discussion of herbs. Finally, consider this play on words: *'testes' verbum honestissimum in iudicio, alio loco non nimis. et honesti 'colei Lanuvini', Cliternini non honesti* ("Testes" is a most respectable word in the lawcourt, not so much in another location. And "Lanuvian bags" are respectable, but Cliternian ones are not', 9.22.4). Again the

humour lies in sexual innuendo, but what is signified is understood only after some effort on the part of the reader.

These examples are carefully constructed so as to require readers to perceive the indecency by exercising their own judgement; the signification is indirect, allusive, and suggestive but still clearly effective. Thus, Cicero's distinctive style in this letter is not purely humorous or 'mock-learned', but is rather in the service of quite serious deliberations on how one can speak frankly on sensitive matters in a subtle, indirect fashion while at the same time making the point clear. This undercuts the Stoic position by showing that ambiguity, double entendre, plays on words, and so forth are viable ways of describing things frankly and truly, even if they rely on cleverness and skill from both sides and are susceptible to misunderstanding. It is also a part of Cicero's Academic rhetorical and philosophical practice – which also resonates with the subtle and allusive practice of Plato himself – that is intended to contrast with the blunt practice of the Stoics.⁵¹

It is also worth noting that Cicero's motivation for preferring the Academic position appears to rest largely on the due respect that social mores deserve. In the final section of the letter he states that he is happy that Paetus is comfortable to speak frankly with him (*te adversus me omnia audere gratum est*) – as noted above, it is characteristic of the relationship between true friends – but quickly distances himself from sanctioning fully this mode of discourse. Cicero's own reticence to adopt such a free and frank style with Paetus suits the nature of their relationship of *amicitia*: Cicero is the older, more senior figure, and he is reasserting his authority with this more serious and decorous comment in a rather informal and racy letter.⁵² Further, Cicero also says that they should respect the Kalends of March, the day of the Matronalia, a festival in honour of Roman *matronae*.⁵³ Cicero's own respect for such social mores contrasts markedly with the practice

⁵¹ This is in keeping with Cicero's practice in the *Paradoxa Stoicorum*; see further pages 179–80 below.

⁵² Hall (2009) highlights this sort of epistolary decorum between Roman aristocrats. Certainly the letters to Paetus are distinctive for their more informal, conversational tone, but limits still apply.

⁵³ See Shackleton Bailey (1977–8: 2.334).

4.3 Academic versus Stoic practice

advocated by the Stoics that he has been extolling throughout the letter.

Thus, Cicero rejects the Stoic position, although he is somewhat sympathetic to it, by appeal to the proper respect that social mores deserve and by the demonstration that there is a viable alternative mode of discourse that achieves the same effects as blunt Stoic free speech without the problems. All the same, the topics that the Stoics talk of openly and Cicero *tectis verbis* are, among other things, *mentula* (with its associations with Mamurra/Caesar) and the current social and political environment.⁵⁴ Indeed, Cicero's reference to Stoics at the end of the letter is in all likelihood alluding to contemporary republican figures such as Cato who were outspoken in their opposition and resistance to Caesar and his allies.⁵⁵ To illustrate this further, a comparison with the *Paradoxa Stoicorum*, which Cicero composed in 46 BC at around the same time as the letter,⁵⁶ is helpful.

Wendt notes how similar *Epistulae ad familiares* 9.22 is to the *Paradoxa Stoicorum*.⁵⁷ There are a number of parallels worth highlighting. The letter is classified as a Stoic *schola* (9.22.5), just as the topics considered in the *Paradoxa Stoicorum* are said to be discussed by the Stoics in the form of *scholae* (5). Despite this label, which suggests a 'technical' (ΘΕΤΙΚΩΣ, 5) presentation, the letter is full of everyday examples and Cicero employs a colloquial tone; it is presented in a style similar to that of the *Paradoxa Stoicorum* (4–5).⁵⁸ The six separate *Paradoxa* also showcase rigorous philosophical reasoning and technical argumentation and can be considered genuine philosophical works.⁵⁹ In this respect they again share much in common with *Epistulae ad*

⁵⁴ Thus, I do not agree with Leach (1999: 169), who thinks that the topic Cicero discusses with guarded words is simply freedom of speech.

⁵⁵ Cicero's identification of Stoicism with the republican cause was particularly strong at this time, as I demonstrate in section 4.4 below.

⁵⁶ In the work itself, Cicero says to Brutus that he was composing the *Paradoxa Stoicorum* when the nights were beginning to shorten (5), which corresponds with my conjectured date of February or March for the letter.

⁵⁷ Wendt (1929).

⁵⁸ For discussion of the rhetorical style of the *Paradoxa Stoicorum*, see Wisniewski (1981) and Wallach (1990).

⁵⁹ See Wallach (1990).

familiares 9.22. It seems reasonable to think of the letter as a philosophical work of the same sort as the six exercises.

In the preface to the *Paradoxa Stoicorum* Cicero praises Cato, whom he labels a perfect Stoic (*perfectus mea sententia Stoicus*, 2), for employing philosophy in the lawcourt and the senate against common practice (1), noting that it is a great achievement since his Stoic views do not find wide acceptance among the *vulgus* (2) and do not present themselves readily to oratorical expression, particularly given the limitations of Stoic rhetoric (2–3).⁶⁰ Cicero contrasts the Stoic approach with the rhetorical practice that he and Brutus, both Academics, would adopt (2).⁶¹ Cicero then says that he will in the present work employ common speech and everyday examples rather than technicality when discussing the Stoic paradoxes (4–5). By employing this manner he hopes that the paradoxes might win acceptance (4). In the exercises themselves Cicero not only outlines the philosophical arguments but also, in the process, makes critical points about certain individuals and the contemporary state of Roman society.⁶² For instance, the first exercise (6–15) is easily read as highlighting the moral shortcomings of those currently in power at Rome by holding up honourable early republican statesmen for comparison. But Cicero's practice here is reliant on suggestion and indirect modes of signification: he discusses *tectis verbis* the sort of things that Cato in Stoic fashion would discuss most openly, but he makes the same criticisms of the regime. We can detect the same rhetorical and argumentative practice and the same political concerns in *Epistulae ad familiares* 9.22. Indeed, the Academic position showcased by Cicero in this letter is not only a clever comment on the Stoic position on free speech but also a commentary on Cicero's own navigation of the problematic socio-political environment under Caesar that offers rewarding perspectives on other letters from this period.

⁶⁰ See further Stern (2005). Compare Cicero, *De oratore* 3.65–6.

⁶¹ On Brutus' Academic credentials, see further Sedley (1997).

⁶² Strasburger (1990: 31) is not alone in detecting 'caeserfeindliche Pointen'; see also Bringmann (1971: 60–71) and Wassmann (1996: 96–138).

4.4 Academic versus Stoic practice when navigating Caesarian society

In *Epistulae ad familiares* 9.22 Cicero highlights his adherence to the principle that one should adjust one's conduct to fit the circumstances.⁶³ Cicero's application of this principle with regard to free speech when navigating Caesarian society also appears in other letters from 46 BC. Consider, for instance, the following passage from a letter to Paetus from mid July:

sed tamen eius ipsius nulla re a me offensus est animus. est enim adhibita in ea re ipsa summa a nobis moderatio. ut enim olim arbitrabar esse meum libere loqui, cuius opera esset in civitate libertas, sic ea nunc amissa nihil loqui quod offendant aut illius aut eorum qui ab illo diliguntur voluntatem. (Cicero, *Epistulae ad familiares* 9.16.3 = 190 SB)

But nevertheless I have done nothing to offend his [Caesar's] personal sensibilities. Indeed in that very matter I have exercised the greatest control. For although at one time I thought that freedom of speech was mine, whose actions instantiated freedom in the community, now that it has gone I willingly say nothing which may offend the sensibilities either of that man or of those who are liked by him.

As in 9.22, here Cicero highlights the conflict between *libertas loquendi* and avoiding offence (*verecundia*). It is implied that an accurate description of the current state of affairs would entail causing offence to Caesar because the truth is unwelcome to him – calling him *mentula* or *tyrannus*, although perhaps a true description, would transgress expected modes of discourse between a despot and his subject (*verecundia*). Thus, given the circumstances, there is no chance to be outspoken without negative repercussions (*libertas loquendi* has now gone), so Cicero is careful to regulate his speech and cause no offence.

In 9.16.3 Cicero seems to hold a very pragmatic position: he follows what is expedient given the circumstances even though he still wishes he could speak freely and not have to mind his words. But expediency is not the only consideration behind

⁶³ We have already seen Cicero associate the principle with Plato at *Fam.* 1.9.18 = 20 SB; see also *Fam.* 9.16.5–6, discussed on pages 185–90 below. See further [chapter 1, section 1.1](#) and [chapter 2, sections 2.4–2.6](#) above. In this section we shall see Cicero also associate the principle with Stoic doctrine.

Cicero's conduct. Preceding this passage (9.16.2) Cicero voices his concerns about how to manoeuvre among Caesar's allies in order to gain their *benevolentia* ('goodwill'). He says it no longer requires *consilium* ('judgement') but rather *artificium quoddam* ('a certain artifice'). His point here is that principled, well-reasoned, sober actions will not suffice, but rather one has to be more subtle or cunning in order to garner support. This shows Cicero's anxieties over 'appearances' and 'reality' when navigating Caesarian society,⁶⁴ but it also shows how circumstances are exceptional and have caused him to change his normal conduct and entertain new modes of social engagement. There is, however, no need to see in such apparently sycophantic actions genuine support for Caesar: one can act while retaining a principled critical stance. Indeed, Cicero is highlighting that his actions are not only inspired by principle but that they are also part of an elaborate façade. His allusion to freedom of speech and his careful distinction between honest judgement and artifice imply, that is signify indirectly, his real attitudes concerning the current state of Roman society: it is really dreadful, corrupt, ruled by a tyrannical prick, and no longer a genuine *res publica*.⁶⁵

A major point to emerge from *Epistulae ad familiares* 9.22 is that there is no need to be blunt and extreme like the Stoics because the same effect can be achieved by other means,⁶⁶ as demonstrated in practice by Cicero himself in that letter. In 9.16 also, Cicero demonstrates that he can speak his mind by alternative modes to calling a spade a spade, free speech in its purest or most obvious Stoic form. At 9.16.4 he stresses to Paetus that any attempt to get past the limits on frank speech with humour and allusion is problematic, noting that Caesar is exceptionally skilled at identifying his jokes and barbs and

⁶⁴ Cicero notes how he fears that the Caesarians' goodwill is a façade and how a crucible test is required to distinguish true from fake (9.16.2).

⁶⁵ Compare the tone of his Caesarian speeches, particularly *Pro Marcello*. Rambaud and le Doyen (1984) note how Cicero employs the resources of Stoic logic in the speech in order to present Caesar in a position acceptable to the *res publica*. Although not stressed by Rambaud and le Doyen, the irony of this characterisation is hard to ignore.

⁶⁶ Indeed, this alternative might well be *more* effective given the surrounding social conditions.

4.4 Academic versus Stoic practice in Caesarian society

that he requests reports on his comments and conversations daily.⁶⁷ However, merely by alluding to *libertas loquendi* and leaving things unsaid (like with *mentula* in 9.22) Cicero makes his points clear.⁶⁸ Thus, Cicero shows that he is maintaining all the expected social graces and mores in Caesarian society but retains ways of making his true feelings and the real nature of things known, namely his nuanced Academic, as opposed to both Stoic and sycophantic, practice with respect to free speech.

Now, a key notion underpinning Cicero's Academic practice is that his current course of action is a legitimate alternative that is no worse than that advocated by the Stoics. Importantly, in 46 BC Cicero was very concerned to counter criticism for failing to live up to Stoic principles, for failing to stay consistent in his commitment to the republican cause. This anxiety over his earlier conduct permeates letters to Varro and other republican sympathisers.⁶⁹ For instance, he admits to Varro that he suspects that he failed to live up to philosophical principles but considers himself forgiven (9.1.2 = 175 SB). This implies that Cicero was aware that there was a problem reconciling his actions with

⁶⁷ See further Corbeill (1996: 214–15) and Leach (1999: 154). On the present dangers surrounding the use of humour, note also *Fam.* 15.18.1 = 213 SB.

⁶⁸ Compare the brilliantly pregnant comment to Marcellus: *dicere fortasse quae sentias non licet, tacere plane licet* (*Fam.* 4.9.2 = 231 SB). Indeed, by alluding in his letters to various republican sympathisers, particularly those like Marcellus only just returning to Italy after defeat in Africa, that he must compose different forms of letter than he otherwise would (e.g., *Fam.* 4.9.2 = 231 SB, 4.13.1–4 = 225 SB, 6.10b = 222 SB, 13.68.2 = 211 SB), Cicero highlights the limits on free and frank speech and makes his real feelings known, even if what is actually written suggests other things (for instance, his admission to Marcellus that he chose to side with Caesar because of the circumstances; *Fam.* 4.7.3 = 230 SB). Cicero's letters at this time are also part of an elaborate social façade and should be read with care: such claims appease any Caesarian eyes that happen to see the letter, and they maintain a suitable modesty and shamefacedness to those republicans like Marcellus who had gone the whole way and who could easily have criticised Cicero for claiming to be just like them. But Cicero carefully insists that his words should be read with a view to a hidden, unsaid subtext.

⁶⁹ Cf e.g., *Fam.* 4.3.1–3 = 202 SB, 5.21.2–4 = 182 SB, 7.3.1–6 = 183 SB, 7.28.3 = 200 SB, 9.1.2 = 175 SB, 9.2.2 = 177 SB, 9.5.2 = 179 SB, 9.6.2–5 = 181 SB, 9.16.5–6 = 190 SB. In these letters he draws heavily on ethical precepts to offer consolation to other republican sympathisers and personal apology for his own decisions and actions in the civil war. Kumaniecki (1957) considers Cicero to have looked towards philosophy in these letters as a form of *consolatio*. Compare the apologies in chapter 1, section 1.1 and chapter 2 above.

principled opposition, but he thought he could construct a defence (cf 9.2.2 = 177 SB, 9.6.2–3 = 181 SB).⁷⁰ In 9.2.2 he refers to the limbo in which he and Varro now find themselves, treated as the vanquished by the Caesarians and as traitors by those sympathetic to the republican cause (*qui enim victoria se effecerunt quasi victos nos intuentur, qui autem victos nostros moleste ferunt nos dolent vivere*). The clearest statement of Cicero's anxieties occurs in a letter to Varro from May:

consili nostri, ne si eos quidem qui id secuti non sunt non paeniteret, nobis paenitendum putarem. secuti enim sumus non spem sed officium, reliquimus autem non officium sed desperationem. ita verecundiores fuimus quam qui se domo non commoverunt, saniores quam qui amissis opibus domum non reverterunt. sed nihil minus fero quam severitatem otiosorum et, quoquo modo se res habet, magis illos vereor qui in bello occiderunt quam hos curo quibus non satis facimus quia vivimus. (Cicero, *Epistulae ad familiares* 9.5.2 = 179 SB)

About our judgement, even if those who did not follow it were not regretting that, I would not think we should regret it. For we followed not hope but duty, and we abandoned not duty but despair. Thus, we were more aware of what was required of us (*verecundiores*) than those who did not move from home, and we were more sensible than those who did not return home when our resources were lost. But I bear nothing worse than the criticism of layabouts and, whatever way matters stand, I respect more those men who died in war than I bother about those whom we do not satisfy because we are alive.

Cicero's anxieties concern the following question: is consistent adherence to principle, in this case support for the republican cause, the only proper course of action even in hopeless situations? If yes, then he and Varro are indeed deserving of censure for still being alive. The Stoic position encapsulates this consistent adherence to principle despite adversity, which in this case has led to the death of all those who have pursued it, namely the republicans who perished in Africa. Cicero stresses that one can of course respect these principled men, but he insists that there were two equally permissible or proper courses of action: death and return home. Cicero argues that changing one's position to fit the circumstances, which is explicitly associated with *verecundia* and

⁷⁰ Compare chapter 2, section 2.3.1 above.

4.4 Academic versus Stoic practice in Caesarian society

being *sanus*, is not an inferior mode of conduct to principled commitment to the death.

The most obvious argument to support Cicero's claim is that such a mode of conduct is still consistent for an Academic like himself (and Varro), since the fundamental principle being applied is that one should tailor one's conduct to fit the circumstances, not that one should stubbornly follow the cause regardless. However, Cicero does not present his case in such bare pragmatic terms, nor does he challenge the legitimacy of the Stoic position, but rather he constructs his own defence largely within the paradigm of Stoic ethics; he is most careful to align himself closely with those republicans who have met death for the cause.⁷¹ The most striking passage in which Cicero develops his Academic position in the framework of Stoicism comes in a letter to Paetus:

sed quae est invidia aut quid mihi nunc invideri potest? verum fac esse omnia: sic video philosophis placuisse iis qui mihi soli videntur vim virtutis tenere, nihil esse sapientis praestare nisi culpam. qua mihi videor dupliciter carere, et quod ea senserim quae rectissima fuerunt et qui<a>, cum viderem praesidi non satis esse ad ea obtinenda, viribus certandum cum valentioribus non putarim. ergo in officio boni civis certe non sum reprehendendus. reliquum est ne quid stulte, ne quid temere dicam aut faciam contra potentis. id quoque puto esse sapientis ... ita fit ut et consiliorum superiorum conscientia et praesentis temporis moderatione me consoler et illam Acci similitudinem non modo iam ad invidiam sed ad Fortunam transferam, quam existimo levem et imbecillam ab animo firmo et gravi tamquam fluctum a saxo frangi oportere. etenim, cum plena sint monumenta Graecorum quem ad modum sapientissimi viri regna tulerint vel Athenis vel Syracusis, cum servientibus suis civitatibus fuerint ipsi quodam modo liberi, ego me non putem tueri meum statum sic posse ut neque offendam animum cuiusquam nec frangam dignitatem meam? (Cicero, *Epistulae ad familiares* 9.16.5–6)

⁷¹ Note that in 46 BC Cicero was most keen to stress his positive attitudes towards Cato, whom he had criticised in an earlier speech *Pro Murena* (63 BC) for his introduction of Stoic philosophy into political life (60–6), by now praising him publicly for these very things in the *Paradoxa Stoicorum* (1–3) and in the *Cato*. Cicero began the *Cato* in May 46 and Caesar countered it with his own *AntiCato* in 45 (*Att.* 12.4.2 = 240 SB, 12.5.2 = 242 SB). For further discussion of Cicero's *Cato* and Caesar's *AntiCato*, which are no longer extant, see Jones (1970), Kierdorf (1978), and Wassmann (1996: 139–59). Note that Caesar thought it pressing to discredit claims that Cato had always acted honourably from Stoic principle (Plut. *Cat. Min.* 52.5). In 45 Brutus appears to have been writing a eulogy of Cato (*Att.* 12.21.1 = 260 SB). Cicero's pro-Stoic attitudes are also apparent in the letters.

But where is the envy or what about me now can be envied? And yet, make it that there are all sorts of things: thus I see that it found favour with those philosophers who alone to my mind seem to grasp the essence of virtue, that the wise man is answerable for nothing except guilt. In which respect I consider myself doubly free, both because I held sentiments which were most proper and because, when I saw that there was not enough strength to maintain them, I did not think that one should contend with superior force. Therefore, in the duty of a good citizen certainly I must not be censured. It remains that I do not speak or act stupidly or rashly against those in power. That too I consider to be the way of the wise man . . . Thus, it happens that I console myself both with the consciousness of my former opinions and with the regulation of my present conduct, and I may apply that simile of Accius' now not only to envy but to Fortune, which I judge must break, fickle and weak, on a firm and steady mind like a wave on a rock. In fact, when the records of Greece are full of examples of how the wisest men bore despotisms, either at Athens or at Syracuse, when in the servitude of their communities they had in some way their freedom, am I not to think that thus I am able to preserve my position so that I neither offend the sensibility of any man nor damage my dignity?

Griffin argues persuasively that Cicero is presenting in this passage a nuanced vision of how the Stoic wise man would act in the current situation.⁷² This also turns out to be, I shall argue, just how an Academic would act, and as Cicero himself has acted. Cicero thus argues that the Stoics should themselves endorse on their own grounds the conduct which he as an Academic has chosen. This passage is a clever reply to those who might criticise his moderate Academic course of action from a Stoic viewpoint.

As Griffin notes, Cicero refers to two Stoic paradoxes.⁷³ First, he alludes to the paradox that 'virtue is the only good, vice the only evil'⁷⁴ when he writes that the wise man is answerable to nothing except guilt (*culpa*), moral culpability,⁷⁵ and insists that he is free from fault for two reasons: (1) he had the right sentiments; (2) by not acting against superior force, he did the

⁷² Griffin (1995: 335–7).

⁷³ Griffin (1995: 335–6). Kumaniecki (1957) notes the other letters in which Cicero alludes to issues pertinent to Stoic paradoxes he discusses in the contemporaneous *Paradoxa Stoicorum*.

⁷⁴ Cicero treats this paradox at *Paradoxa Stoicorum* 6–15.

⁷⁵ Griffin (1995: 336) notes that this is one of Cicero's favourite ways of presenting the paradox (*Tusc.* 3.34).

4.4 Academic versus Stoic practice in Caesarian society

right thing.⁷⁶ Neither his motives nor his actions are blame-worthy. Second, with the simile regarding fortune, Cicero alludes to another Stoic paradox, that virtue is sufficient for happiness.⁷⁷ Regardless of what happens or what people think, Cicero himself is happy: he is content that he has done the right thing for the right reasons and that he is now acting rightly for the right reasons; he has a clear conscience and no reason not to be happy, nor can others or outside forces cause him not to be happy.

Cicero insists that he has followed, and continues to follow, with his moderate speech and deportment, an appropriate course of action that should be endorsed by the Stoics. His motives were and are pure, and, in Stoic terms, his conduct was and is appropriate given the circumstances (καθῆκον).⁷⁸ In contrast with what we saw in the letter to Varro above (9.5.2), not only the republicans who perished but also those who have gone home and now carefully regulate their conduct should be considered to have acted appropriately and should be praised by the Stoics; indeed, perhaps this latter group have the better case for Stoic praise. Thus Cicero stresses that the Stoic path epitomised in death, particularly the suicide of Cato,⁷⁹ is not the only option faithful to their core ethical principles. In 9.17 (= 195 SB) and 9.18 (= 191 SB) Cicero admits that in these turbulent times there is no better alternative option to what he is doing than death, the option chosen by Cato and others. But although death is always a choice available to him, it is not a necessary option: *demus modo operam ne tam necesse nobis sit quam illi fuit, id quod agimus* ('I have only to do my best so that it does not become so much a matter of necessity for me as it was for him

⁷⁶ Note that Cicero presents himself as doing the right thing from two perspectives: as a good Roman citizen and in terms of Stoic ethics.

⁷⁷ Cicero treats this paradox at *Paradoxa Stoicorum* 16–19.

⁷⁸ Demmel (1962: 47–62) argues that here Cicero is concerned with determining the *officium* of a good Roman citizen, which dictates what action is appropriate in the situation. This appropriate action need not be how the Stoic wise man would act; but it might of course happen to coincide (at least in terms of the content of the action, not in terms of the motives behind it), which seems to be what Cicero is highlighting here with his references to the *sapiens* rather than claiming to be a Stoic wise man himself. Compare Griffin (1995: 335–6).

⁷⁹ See further Bringmann (1971: 70–1), Griffin (1986), and Wassmann (1996: 150–9).

[Cato], which is what I am doing', 9.18.2; cf 9.17.1).⁸⁰ Indeed, if he avoids offence and acts properly (as we have seen him doing in 9.22 and 9.16), taking a course of conduct that the Stoics themselves should endorse (*reliquum est ne quid stulte, ne quid temere dicam aut faciam contra potentis. id quoque puto esse sapientis*, 9.16.5),⁸¹ then it will in all likelihood never come to pass that he should choose death.

Now, Cicero's course of action is proper only if we accept that it is a justifiable alternative to the option of death, only if we accept that this is really what the Stoic wise man would do: is adjusting to circumstances, something that is closely identified with Academic practice, really how the Stoic wise man would act? In a letter to Marcellus from August Cicero states simply: *primum tempori cedere, id est necessitati parere, semper sapientis est habitum* ('First, to yield to the times, that is to obey necessity, is always the act of a wise man', 4.9.2 = 231 SB).⁸² Certainly, the Stoics did maintain that the wise man would change his preferred mode of life depending on the circumstances (Cic. *Fin.* 3.68; Sen. *De otio* 3.2–3, 8.1–4; DL 7.121, 7.131; *SVF* 3.686, 3.690, 3.694, 3.698, 3.702).⁸³ But in this passage from 9.16 Cicero proceeds to justify this claim with appeal to the specific historical examples of Socrates under the thirty tyrants at Athens and Plato under the despotism of Dionysius at Syracuse.

These examples gain their authority from the presumption that most (including the Stoics) would consider Socrates and Plato to be wise men (or at least very close approximations to wise men – Cicero labels them *sapientissimi viri*): the actions of Socrates under the thirty and Plato under Dionysius thus illustrate what the wise man would do in such circumstances. Cicero implies that Socrates and Plato did not resist the despotisms at Athens and Syracuse by force or by being brash and foolhardy, committing

⁸⁰ Note that at *De officiis* 1.112 Cicero also says that Cato's suicide, although noble, was not the only alternative open to a Stoic at this time, since (differing) personal circumstances are highly significant when determining a proper action.

⁸¹ Speaking stupidly or rashly against those in power appears equivalent to calling a spade a spade.

⁸² This recalls what we saw in [chapter 1, section 1.1](#) above (*Fam.* 1.9.18, 21 = 20 SB). Griffin (1995: 336) lists some further examples of Stoics expressing such sentiments.

⁸³ See further Reedy (1994), Schofield (2000a: 443–53), and Parrish (2007: 40–2).

4.4 Academic versus Stoic practice in Caesarian society

themselves either to freedom or to death like the republicans who perished in Africa, but rather subtly adjusted their conduct so as to make the best of a bad situation.⁸⁴

Importantly, the examples appear to have something of a Stoic pedigree. By Cicero's period both the Academy and the Stoa had for some time been portraying a positive image of Socrates, particularly with respect to his ethical conduct.⁸⁵ Further, it seems that when pressured to list historical examples of wise men the Stoics did point to Socrates, along with Diogenes the Cynic (e.g., Epict. *Disc.* 3.24.60–76, 4.1.152–77; cf DL 7.121).⁸⁶ It is notable that Epictetus often (as in the two passages cited) describes in detail Socrates' actions under the thirty tyrants when holding him up as a model for proper conduct. Although the Stoics were influenced heavily by Platonic philosophy,⁸⁷ there is no firm evidence that they presented Plato as an example of a sage.⁸⁸ We have, however, already seen Cicero himself appeal to Plato's *auctoritas* in matters of political conduct (*Fam.* 1.9.18 = 20 SB).⁸⁹ Indeed, we know that Plato in particular is one of Cicero's favourite points of reference when making apologies for his political conduct, in particular for vacillations, the avoidance of outright commitment to a cause, and his apparent willingness to accommodate himself to Caesar and his political order.⁹⁰ We have also already seen him appeal to the example of Socrates in such a context (*Att.* 8.2.4 = 152 SB).⁹¹ In this particular case (9.16.5–6) Cicero's practice is distinguished by a strong Stoic twist: he shows how his political conduct might also arise from Stoic reasoning. In this letter Cicero makes the point that adjusting one's conduct to fit the circumstances, in this case moderating

⁸⁴ I elaborate on the nature of their actions below. See also chapter 2, sections 2.4 and 2.5.1 above.

⁸⁵ Steven (2007: chapters 4–7) demonstrates how this positive picture of Socrates was developed by certain key figures in the Hellenistic period, in particular the Stoic Panaetius.

⁸⁶ On the Stoic depiction of Socrates as a wise man, see, for instance, Döring (1974 and 1979: 5–17), most relevant for Cicero's period and earlier.

⁸⁷ See in particular the recent collection of studies in Bonazzi and Helmig (2007).

⁸⁸ In the *De finibus*, however, Cicero suggests that the Stoics considered Plato as coming close to being a sage (4.21, 4.56, 4.64).

⁸⁹ Chapter 1, section 1.1 above.

⁹⁰ See in particular chapter 1, section 1.1 and chapter 2 above.

⁹¹ Pages 90–2 above.

one's speech and action given those now in power, is not only a proper course of action from a pragmatic Academic but also from a Stoic or principled republican perspective: he cannot, therefore, be criticised fairly from this point of view.

It is worth expanding on how Cicero conceives of freedom (*libertas*) and dignity (*dignitas*) in the manner of Plato and Socrates. The mode of conduct pursued by Cicero involves a façade of support for the regime: he appears a willing-enough subject and avoids out-and-out resistance. But it does not require true support for Caesar nor close involvement in politics or the institutions of the regime: Socrates and Plato maintained their principles while they remained under despotisms, and they did not act willingly on behalf of the rulers. Rather, they displayed their opposition as much as they reasonably could: Socrates criticised the tyrants and refused to follow illegal orders (Xen. *Mem.* 1.2.30–9; Plat. *Apol.* 32c3–d8, *Ep.* 7.324c2–325b1) and Plato was obstructive and refused to be proactive on Dionysius' behalf (*Ep.* 7.348e5–350b5). To be sure, the examples of Socrates and Plato demonstrate in different ways that there is also some scope for free speech under despotisms, even if not of the traditional sort permitted in the Roman republic: Socrates was particularly outspoken against the thirty (Xen. *Mem.* 1.2.30–9) whereas Plato was more circumspect in his advocacy of staying silent and out of the way as much as possible (e.g., Plat. *Ep.* 7.331c7–d6). We have already seen Cicero invoke the moderate practice of Plato in *Epistulae ad familiares* 9.22 and the earlier parts of 9.16, while at the same time making it clear that he wishes he could act like Socrates and not have to mind his words so carefully.

From other letters we can infer that for Cicero this mode of conduct also involves literary and intellectual pursuits as opposed to traditional modes of political conduct, where one was a puppet with no real degree of freedom and dignity (e.g., *Fam.* 4.4.4 = 203 SB). He writes to Varro:

quis enim hoc non dederit nobis, ut, cum opera nostra patria sive non possit uti sive nolit, ad eam vitam revertamur quam multi docti homines, fortasse non recte sed tamen multi, etiam rei publicae praeponendam putaverunt? (Cicero, *Epistulae ad familiares* 9.6.5 = 181 SB)

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Indeed, how could this not be granted to us, that, since our country either cannot or does not want to use our services, we return to that life which many learned men (perhaps not rightly but none the less many) have considered even to be preferable to political affairs?

And in another letter to Varro he asserts:

si nemo utetur opera, tamen et scribere et legere πολιτείας, et, si minus in curia atque in foro, at in litteris et libris, ut doctissimi veteres fecerunt, gnare rem publicam et de moribus ac legibus quaerere. (Cicero, *Epistulae ad familiares* 9.2.5 = 177 SB)

If there is no use for our services, we must none the less both write and read *Republics*, and, if less so in the senate house and in the Forum, rather in letters and books, as the most learned ancients did, we must serve the state and enquire into customs and laws.

Cicero places a real degree of freedom and dignity in the realm of the mind, in the intellectual life. This is in keeping with the ethical views of Antiochus of Ascalon, the Old Academic, who argued that intellectual pursuits could alleviate one's ills in adverse times (Cic. *Fin.* 5.53). Cicero praises this mode of life, and the philosophical and literary activities that instantiate it, in numerous letters from 46, not only to Varro (9.1.2, 9.2.5, 9.3, 9.6.5 = 175–7, 181 SB), himself an adherent of the Old Academy (*Acad.* 1.13), but also to correspondents including Mescinius Rufus (5.21.2 = 182 SB), Papirius Paetus (9.20.3 = 193 SB), Manius Curius (7.28.2 = 200 SB), Lucius Luceius (5.13.5 = 201 SB), Servius Sulpicius Rufus (4.3.3–4, 4.4.4–5 = 202–3 SB), Cornificius (12.17.2 = 204 SB), and Nigidius Figulus (4.13.1–3 = 225 SB). Throughout he stresses that this mode of life serves the *res publica* positively (in contrast to full support for Caesar or death), is justified by the circumstances, and, as the examples of Socrates and Plato show, allows a real, if limited, degree of personal freedom and is a truly dignified, if, all things being equal, unwelcome, form of existence.⁹²

In sum, Cicero makes it clear in these letters that adjusting to circumstances and getting along smoothly in Caesarian society do

⁹² In Antiochean terms it is *beate* but not *beatissime*. See also Cicero, *De officiis* 1.69–73 and 1.154–8.

not have to entail full commitment merely to what is expedient:⁹³ acting carefully and tempering one's speech and conduct do not necessitate an undignified existence, do not require one, in reality, to cease being principled, and do not entail surrendering one's freedom entirely. So long as one can balance successfully the demands of the role of Caesarian subject against the reality of one's principles, then one can lead a somewhat satisfying and acceptable existence. We have seen Cicero present himself in his letters as achieving exactly this happy medium through his subtle Academic practice;⁹⁴ he also recommends it as the appropriate way for a republican, indeed for a Stoic, to navigate Caesarian society.

4.5 Conclusion

Epistulae ad familiares 9.22 is a philosophical work, of a kind very similar to the contemporary *Paradoxa Stoicorum*, which demonstrates Cicero's skilled rhetorical and philosophical practice. Our analysis of Cicero's practice in the letter allows us to understand it as an Academic commentary on Stoic material, making a clever point about how Stoic goals can be achieved by subtler and more effective Academic means. Cicero's point is not

⁹³ Note that in the philosophical framework that we have seen Cicero use to mirror the political scene, the Epicurean is the Caesarian option, that which matches unashamed commitment to the *utile*; on the association of Caesar with Epicureanism, see further Momigliano (1941), Bourne (1977), Grimal (1986: 267–73), Dettenhoffer (1990), and Benferhat (2005: 233–312). This is the option of gluttony, idle submission, depravity, devotion to the façade, to the rotten Caesarian despotism. In fact, in the letters of this period Cicero uses plenty of Epicurean and gastronomic imagery when discussing, interacting, and associating with Caesarians (e.g., 7.26.2 = 210 SB, 9.7.1 = 178 SB, 9.15.5 = 196 SB, 9.16.7–9 = 190 SB, 9.19 = 194 SB, 9.20.2 = 193 SB, 9.26.1–3 = 197 SB). Leach (1999) offers a useful analysis of these motifs. Dettenhoffer's (1990) study of the Cassius correspondence from early 45 BC (15.16–19) accords with this picture in general terms, although I would not wish to accept her argument that the philosophical elements in these letters are a carefully crafted political code to be deciphered; see discussion on pages 19–26 above.

⁹⁴ Note that in a later letter to Cassius (*Fam.* 15.18.1 = 213 SB) Cicero professes some discomfort at the nature of this Academic existence: '*ubi igitur*' inquires '*philosophia?*' *tua quidem in culina, mea molesta est; pudet enim servire. itaque facio me alias res agere ne convicium Platonis audiam.* The passage is discussed in detail on pages 20–3 above.

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only general but is also made with particular reference to the contemporary social and political circumstances.

Our reading offers fresh perspectives on other letters from 46 BC, as I have shown in the few examples explicitly considered in [section 4.4](#) above.⁹⁵ In 46 Cicero identifies Stoicism with the republican cause. On the one hand, the Stoic course of action pursued stubbornly and consistently to its end is identified with death, epitomised by the suicide of Cato. This outcome can be respected and is undeniably noble. But Cicero is at pains to establish that this is not the only course of action open to the principled republican. Cicero presents an alternative that is faithful to the spirit of the republican cause and only cosmetically different: the Academic position. In his letters Cicero insists and demonstrates in practice that by acting in a subtle, nuanced, moderate Academic fashion, one can navigate Caesarian society successfully in a dignified, principled republican manner.

Cicero's use of Stoic and Academic philosophy in these letters suggests that he was seeking some form of quietude and intellectual escape in 46 and 45 BC as Caesar assumed unrivalled power at Rome.⁹⁶ None the less, he was also intimately involved in political activity: he made an important speech to the senate in 46, *Pro Marcello*, in which he praised Caesar's *magnitudo animi* ('greatness of soul') (*Fam.* 4.4.3–4 = 203 SB),⁹⁷ as well as two in the lawcourts, *Pro Ligario* and *Pro rege Deiotaro*, which both among other things flatter Caesar;⁹⁸ and he also maintained epistolary correspondence with Caesar's agents Balbus and Oppius (e.g., *Att.* 12.19.2 = 257 SB,

⁹⁵ There are other letters from this period that would repay closer attention in the light of this exposition.

⁹⁶ Indeed, he was very productive in these years, composing *Paradoxa Stoicorum*, *Orator*, *Brutus*, *De optimo genere oratorum*, *Cato*, *Consolatio*, *Hortensius*, *De finibus*, *De natura deorum*, *Academica*, *De divinatione*, and perhaps *Timaeanus*.

⁹⁷ In the letter Cicero suggests that he felt compelled to make such praise, for silence would suggest his disapproval of the regime and work against the restitution of Marcellus.

⁹⁸ For further discussion of these speeches and the extent to which Cicero's praise of Caesar was sincere, see, for example, Dyer (1990), Kerkhecker (2002), Winterbottom (2002), and Gildenhard (2011: 223–43).

12.44.3 = 285 SB, 12.51.2 = 293 SB, 13.27.1 = 298 SB), who were very keen for him to play an active role in support of the new order. In the next chapter we shall see that in his dealings with Caesar in 45 BC Cicero drew on a set of philosophical resources and critical approaches that went beyond the Stoa and the Academy.

CHAPTER 5

DEALING WITH CAESAR: THE ΣΥΜΒΟΥΛΕΥΤΙΚΟΝ

After Caesar's defeat of the republican forces in Africa in 46 BC, it seems that Cicero sought some kind of reconciliation with him.¹ He delivered three speeches that contained flattery and praise of Caesar, and in his letters he was careful to align himself closely with the powers that be, owing in part to his fears that his property might be confiscated (*Att.* 11.24.2 = 234 SB, 12.21.2 = 260 SB).² As part of this reconfiguring of his relationship with Caesar, Cicero entertained the notion of writing him a formal philosophical letter of advice – a συμβουλευτικόν.³ Now, although there has been plenty of attention given to Cicero's relationship with Caesar at this time, serious scholarly interest in the nature of the συμβουλευτικόν itself has not been great.⁴ This is understandable given the fact that the letter itself is unfortunately no longer extant. However, as I show in this chapter, a careful examination of the surviving evidence surrounding the συμβουλευτικόν offers some novel insights into Cicero's philosophical and epistolary practice that in turn shed light on aspects of his dealings with

¹ For detailed historical accounts of Cicero's actions in this period, see, for example, Gelzer (1969: 264–324), Stockton (1971: 269–79), Rawson (1983: 208–29), Mitchell (1991: 266–88), and Botermann (1992).

² See further Shackleton Bailey (1965–70: 5.293) and Frederiksen (1966: 131).

³ Note that this letter to Caesar is not the only example of Cicero employing the format of the philosophical letter of advice. The best extant example is *Epistulae ad Quintum fratrem* 1.1 = 1 SB from the beginning of 59 BC, in which he advises his brother Quintus on how to be a just and successful provincial governor. The letter is in many ways a showpiece composed for a particular grand occasion, and it reads a lot like a treatise; indeed, Plezia (1975) and MacKendrick (1989: 2) think this letter can be considered Cicero's first philosophical work. See chapter 1, n. 67 above for a brief discussion of Cicero's use of Platonic philosophy in a section of the letter. Also, see White (2010: 117–35) for discussion of general issues surrounding giving and receiving advice by letter.

⁴ Schmidt (1893: 61–4, 285–9), Brožek (1961), and Botermann (1992: 187–8) are the most detailed and informative discussions I could find, although they do not emphasise the letter's status as a philosophical work.

Caesar. In particular, we get some of our strongest evidence for the nature of Cicero's engagement with the epistles of Aristotle to Alexander the Great, which are in all likelihood spurious,⁵ and the ways in which Cicero thought Aristotle's ethical and political views might be applicable in Roman political life.

A vivid series of letters to Atticus from early May until mid June 45 BC details Cicero's plan and addresses the content and reception of the συμβουλευτικόν. Let us take the following passage as a starting point:

qualis futura sit Caesaris vituperatio contra laudationem meam perspexi ex eo libro quem Hirtius ad me misit; in quo colligit vitia Catonis, sed cum maximis laudibus meis. itaque misi librum ad Muscam ut tuis librariis daret. volo enim eum divulgari, quoque facilius fiat imperabis tuis.

συμβουλευτικόν saepe conor. nihil reperio, et quidem mecum habeo et Ἀριστοτέλους et Θεοπόμπου πρὸς Ἀλέξανδρον. sed quid simile? illi et quae ipsis honesta essent scribebant et grata Alexandro. ecquid tu eius modi reperis? mihi quidem nihil in mentem venit. (Cicero, *Epistulae ad Atticum* 12.40.1–2 = 281 SB)

I have gathered from the book which Hirtius sent me what the coming censure of Caesar against my praise will be like; in that book he gathers the flaws of Cato, but with great praise for me. And so I sent the book to Musca so that he might give it to your copyists. For I want it made public, and to do so more easily please will you instruct your people.

I attempt often a letter of advice. I devise nothing. And in fact I have with me both Aristotle's and Theopompus' letters to Alexander. But what is similar? The things which they wrote were both a credit to them and welcome to Alexander. Do you see anything analogous? Nothing comes to my mind.

The first section of the letter concerns Caesar's reaction to Cicero's *Cato*, which by all accounts was full of praise for the

⁵ There are a few surviving references to Aristotle's letters to Alexander, some of which give some indication as to their content (see further [section 5.1](#) below). Diogenes Laertius records that the letters to Alexander were organised in four books (5.27). The pseudo-Aristotelian *Secretum secretorum*, a strange text that was influential in the Middle Ages but whose provenance is uncertain, has lots of advice to kings and some letters said to be by Aristotle to Alexander, one of which concerns the virtue of the king – see further Williams (2003). There are also examples of letters purporting to be from Alexander to Aristotle; see Gunderson (1980). In all likelihood these letters are spurious, although the question of authenticity need not bother us, since, as with the Platonic letters, Cicero and his contemporaries appear to have accepted them as genuine. For scholarly discussion of the problem, see Košelenko (1974). There is no indication that anyone in antiquity thought Aristotle's letters to Alexander to be less than genuine.

recently deceased hero of the republican cause (Tac. *Ann.* 4.34.4; Macr. *Sat.* 6.2.33).⁶ Assuming as Cicero did that the book which Hirtius sent is an accurate reflection of Caesar's tract (cf *Att.* 12.41.4 = 283 SB), it seems that Caesar was prepared to respect Cicero in public, as his own response to the *Cato* – the *AntiCato* – took care to differentiate praiseworthy author from blameworthy subject; Caesar seems to have been careful to present a positive relationship with Cicero (cf *Fam.* 6.10a.2 = 223 SB, 4.13.2 = 225 SB), which was respectful and even frank as both could disagree on fundamental issues of some weight and sensitivity. Evidently Caesar was supporting Cicero's public image,⁷ and Cicero himself was apparently very keen to have Atticus' copyists disseminate widely his own positive portrayal.⁸ As the second section of the letter shows, in this climate where a political relationship was being fashioned cannily by both parties, Cicero was also contemplating writing a letter of advice to Caesar on the model of earlier Greek examples, notably the letters of Aristotle and Theopompus to Alexander the Great.⁹ But he was struggling to determine the precise form and content of the letter: given the disanalogies with the present situation, Cicero did not think he could please Caesar and do credit to himself at the same time, something that Aristotle and Theopompus achieved with Alexander.¹⁰ Nevertheless, Cicero persevered with the project.

In subsequent letters, as we shall see in more detail below, Cicero describes to Atticus his efforts in bringing the project to fruition. He succeeds in completing a draft manuscript but feels obliged (after consultation with Atticus) to send it first to Caesar's agents Oppius and Balbus for vetting (12.51.2 = 293 SB, 12.52.2 = 294 SB, 13.1.3 = 296 SB), as a matter of courtesy and

⁶ For detailed discussion, see further Jones (1970), Kierdorf (1978), and Wassmann (1996: 139–59).

⁷ Compare Caesar's tactics in *Att.* 9.6A = 172A SB from 49 BC, discussed in chapter 2, section 2.2 above.

⁸ In *Att.* 12.44.1 = 285 SB Cicero rather disingenuously tells Atticus that he wants Hirtius' account disseminated so as to generate more praise for Hirtius.

⁹ Shackleton Bailey (1965–70: 5.331) notes that Athenaeus refers to one of Theopompus' letters to Alexander as αἱ πρὸς Ἀλέξανδρον συμβουλαί (*Deipn.* 6.230e, 13.595a).

¹⁰ See section 5.2 below for detailed discussion of these reasons.

so that he might avoid offending Caesar (13.27.1 = 298 SB). They then demanded many changes and Cicero felt unable to accommodate them (13.27.1; cf 13.28.2 = 299 SB); so Cicero abandoned plans to send the letter to Caesar himself, although the original draft copy remained in the hands of Oppius and Balbus.

To be sure, the letter of advice was an established format through which the philosopher could speak frankly to a ruler, typically a king,¹¹ and it was a genre of philosophical letter with a long history: some of the Platonic letters are such letters of advice (e.g., *Ep.* 8), and in the Hellenistic period such letters proliferate from philosophers of all persuasions.¹² Notably, many of these letters of advice were lengthy and essentially took the form of a treatise;¹³ indeed, some of them bore the title *On Kingship* such as at least one of Aristotle's particularly lengthy letters to Alexander (ps.-Demetrius, *On Style* 234).¹⁴ A treatise *On Kingship*, perhaps in the form of a letter, appears to have been a standard component of a philosopher's oeuvre in the Hellenistic period.¹⁵

In this chapter I argue that Cicero's letter of advice to Caesar was conceived as a sort of kingship tract in this well-established tradition: through it Cicero intended to explore philosophical themes such as *magnitudo animi*, *gloria*, and good rule, as he sought to influence and relate to Caesar, who was now in a position of dictatorial power.¹⁶ In the first section I look closely at Cicero's sources, in particular Aristotle's letters to Alexander, in order to gather some further idea of the Greek models he was

¹¹ See further Murray (1965: 179): 'the writing of συμβουλευτικοί, treatises of practical advice, was common in the Hellenistic world, particularly by philosophers to kings'.

¹² For detailed discussion of the genre of 'kingship literature' with informative illustrating examples, see Murray (2007) with further bibliography.

¹³ Compare Cicero's very lengthy letter of advice to his brother Quintus (1.1 = 1 SB).

¹⁴ Diogenes Laertius records that there was only one book *On Kingship* (5.22), in addition to four books of letters to Alexander (5.27). Later biographers of Aristotle also suggest that Aristotle wrote *On Kingship* for Alexander (646 Rose).

¹⁵ Diogenes Laertius lists *On Kingship* in the oeuvres of Aristotle (5.22), Theophrastus (5.42), Strato (5.59), Antisthenes (6.16), Zeno of Citium (7.36), Cleanthes (7.175), Sphaerus (7.178), and Epicurus (10.28).

¹⁶ Caesar first assumed the title dictator in 48 BC (for eleven days before stepping down) (Plut. *Caes.* 37.1). He accepted the title again later in 48 for around a year (Plut. *Caes.* 51.1). Then in 46 he was made dictator once again for a set period of ten years before becoming dictator for life in early 44 (Cic. *Phil.* 2.87).

5.1 Aristotle and the letter of advice

emulating. In the second section I seek to reconstruct the content of Cicero's letter of advice, using what we can uncover in the letters to Atticus. In the third section I make the case that in his letter of advice Cicero was drawing on a range of philosophical concepts and resources from his own philosophical works, which can also be associated closely with views found in Aristotle, in an attempt to compel Caesar to act virtuously as dictator, and thereby to attain true glory for himself and the restoration and preservation of the *res publica* for all.

5.1 Aristotle and the letter of advice

Let us start by identifying fully the sources for Cicero's letter of advice. In his letters to Atticus Cicero mentions reading the second book of Antisthenes' *Cyrus* (12.38a.2 = 279 SB), which was also entitled *On Kingship* (DL 6.16); Aristotle's letters to Alexander (12.40.2 = 281 SB, 13.28.2–3 = 299 SB); and Theopompus' letters to Alexander (12.40.2). There is evidence that Cicero turns towards particular works of the Peripatetic Dicaearchus near the end of May (13.30.2 = 303 SB, 13.32.2 = 305 SB), when he had the idea of crafting the letter to Caesar into a new format – a political conference with distinguished Roman statesmen presenting and debating the key points (13.32.3). The source material is rather disparate: there is a Socratic philosopher distinct from the Platonic tradition in Antisthenes, a historian in Theopompus,¹⁷ and two major figures in the Peripatetic tradition in Aristotle and Dicaearchus. There are two kingly figures in focus: the Persian Cyrus, who had the reputation of being a particularly good and beneficent ruler (Cic. *Rep.* 1.43–4),¹⁸ and Alexander the Great, who had a particularly glorious reputation among the Romans.¹⁹ Indeed, in the imperial period comparing Caesar with Alexander was common practice (App. *BCiv.* 2.149–54; Suet. *Div. Iul.* 7.1; Plut. *Caes.*

¹⁷ Theopompus had a reputation for sharp talking and was sometimes associated with the Cynics; see [chapter 1](#), n. 46 above.

¹⁸ See in particular Xenophon's *Education of Cyrus*.

¹⁹ For further discussion see, for example, Wirth (1976).

11.5–6), and it is conceivable that Caesar himself encouraged this during his own lifetime.²⁰

There are no further references to Cyrus and Cicero appears to focus his attention on the example of Alexander. Perhaps the most interesting source then is Aristotle, who according to tradition acted as tutor to Alexander the Great.²¹ There are a number of independent sources for the nature of his letters to Alexander.²² Pseudo-Demetrius uses Aristotle's letters as a standard of good practice and praises their plain yet elegant style (*On Style* 223, 225, 230, 233–4), but he does not offer us much with regard to their content. An anonymous biographer says straightforwardly that Aristotle instructed Alexander on how to rule (*Vita Aristotelis Marciana* 94–6 Gigon). Plutarch reports how Aristotle advised Alexander to act towards Greeks as their leader, towards foreigners as their master, to treat the Greeks as friends, foreigners as animals and plants. Plutarch states that Alexander failed to heed Aristotle's advice, which explains the ills that befall him (*De Alex. fort.* 329b). Aelian records that Aristotle also advised him not to be angry at inferior men but rather at greater; but no one is greater than Alexander and so he should not be angry (*Var. His.* 12.54). However, as it happens, in a letter to Atticus Cicero himself gives us a decent indication of the core material with which he was interested, which will serve as a better guide since we cannot be certain which particular letters to Alexander Cicero had before him in 45 BC. The passage is lengthy but worth quoting in full:

nam quae sunt ad Alexandrum hominum eloquentium et doctorum suasiones vides quibus in rebus versentur. adolescentem incensum cupiditate verissimae gloriae, cupientem sibi aliquid consili dari quod ad laudem sempiternam valeret, cohortantur ad decus. non deest oratio. ego quid possum? tamen nescio quid e quercu exsculpseram quod videretur simile simulacri. in eo quia non nulla erant paulo meliora quam ea quae fiunt et facta sunt, reprehenduntur; quod me minime paenitet. si enim pervenissent istae litterae, mihi crede, nos paeniteret. quid? tu non vides ipsum illum Aristoteli discipulum, summo ingenio, summa modestia,

²⁰ For detailed discussion, see Green (1978). When celebrating a triumph in 61 BC Pompey also seems to have aligned himself closely with Alexander by wearing a cloak that was said to belong to him (App. *BMith.* 12.17).

²¹ See further Chroust (1964).

²² The fragments and testimonia are usefully presented in Plezia (1977: 13–14, 16–18).

5.1 Aristotle and the letter of advice

postea quam rex appellatus sit, superbum, crudelem, immoderatum fuisse? quid? tu hunc de pompa, Quirini contubernalem, his nostris moderatis epistulis laetaturum putas? ille vero potius non scripta desideret quam scripta non probet. postremo ut volet. abiit illud quod tum me stimulabat cum tibi dabam πρόβλημα Ἀρχιμήδειον. multo mehercule magis nunc opto casum illum quam tum timebam, vel quem libebit. (Cicero, *Epistulae ad Atticum* 13.28.2–3 = 299 SB)

As for the entreaties of eloquent and learned men which are addressed to Alexander, you see with what matters they are engaged. A young man fired by a desire for truest glory, desiring that some piece of advice be given to him which would add strength to his immortal fame, they exhort him to virtue. The words don't desert one. What can I say? All the same, I had managed to carve something from the wood that seemed to bear some likeness. In which, because there were a few things that were a little better than what is happening and has happened, they are disapproved; which disturbs me barely at all. For if that letter had been sent out, believe me, I would have been sorry. What? Do you not see that that man, the pupil of Aristotle, with supreme natural talent, supreme temperance, after he had been pronounced king became arrogant, cruel, intemperate? What? Do you think that this man in the procession, this companion of Quirinus, will be glad with my moderate letter? In truth it is better that he desire what I don't write than disapprove what I do write. Finally, let him do as he wants. That thing has gone that worried me then, when I gave you a 'problem for an Archimedes'. By Hercules I now hope so much the more for that fate, or whatever fate will please him, than I feared it then.

We can gather from this a number of important points about the nature of Aristotle's letters and his advice to Alexander (Aristotle and Theopompus appear to be treated equivalently here, so what follows also applies to Theopompus). For a start, it is Alexander who desired advice on how he might attain true glory and so immortal fame; he appears to have solicited the advice from Aristotle. In response Aristotle exhorts him to distinction in honourable deeds – they are what lead to true glory, and so to the immortal fame Alexander desires. The nature of these honourable deeds is unclear from Cicero's letter, but one can presume that Aristotle advised virtuous kingly conduct such as resisting anger and fostering friendship as well as ruling beneficently for the greater good of all.²³

²³ Aristotle has some significant things to say about good kingship in the *Politics*, which I discuss in more detail in [section 5.2](#) below.

It is worth noting that the views on *gloria* that Cicero attributes to Aristotle in this letter clearly accord with Cicero's own. First, we can gather from Cicero that a desire for *gloria*, for immortal fame that would live on after one's death, was a normal motivation for those involved in political and military life (e.g., *Q. fr.* 1.1.41–2 = 1 SB, *Arch.* 6.14, *Rep.* 5.9).²⁴ In early writings Cicero suggests that *gloria* was simply popular acclaim, being recognised and held in esteem by many people (*De inv.* 2.166). However, from around the time of his own consulship, *gloria* is being defined in such a way that it requires remarkable service to the *res publica*, performed not from a desire for personal gain but from duty and the awareness that the good is to be chosen for its own sake (e.g., *Rab. Perd.* 10.29, *Q. fr.* 1.1.41); only with proper motives will *gloria* be guaranteed to give immortal fame. Cicero has the character Scipio make this clear in the sixth book of *De republica*: it is not triumphs and statues and personal acclaim that he desires, but a longer-lasting and more stable kind of reward, the immortality that comes from true *gloria*, which is attained only by 'virtue herself' and service to the state (6.8, 6.25–6).

This attitude is reinforced in Cicero's later philosophical works. In the fifth book of *De finibus* he describes how all men without exception are moved by displays of virtue, as is evident in the audience's reaction to noble deeds when performed on stage (5.63–4). He concludes that glory is a result of virtuous conduct, since what is being praised is moral worth itself and the selfless dedication to the good over what is expedient (5.64). In the *De officiis* there is a detailed account of how to win 'the highest and truest glory', which probably recalls material in Cicero's lost *De gloria* (2.31). After outlining matters in more depth (2.32–43), Cicero concludes that 'true glory' is to be attained by performing the duties demanded by justice (*qui igitur adipisci veram gloriam volet, iustitiae fungatur officiis*, 2.43); this generates the goodwill and respect from all men that is required for true *gloria*. On the

²⁴ For the evolution of Cicero's thinking on *gloria*, from the time of *De inventione* onwards, see Sullivan (1941) and Long (1995b). Cicero's treatise dedicated to the subject, *De gloria* composed in 44 BC, is unfortunately no longer extant.

other hand, all insincere self-serving actions that do not accord with justice or the good, which as a matter of fact are performed often owing to the burning desire for *gloria* (1.64–6), lead only to a false and unstable form of glory (*quodsi qui simulatione et inani ostentatione et ficto non modo sermone, sed etiam voltu stabilem se gloriam consequi posse rentur, vehementer errant*, 2.43). They do not generate universal goodwill and respect, and one's glorious reputation is merely a matter of popular fashion and of no real value at all.²⁵

We can see that, for Cicero, there are false and true versions of glory (*ficta gloria* and *vera gloria*). On the one hand, true glory is immortal and secure: it is not a matter of debate since everyone without fail is moved to love the glorious man if he really is virtuous. On the other hand, false glory arises from seemingly great deeds that lack the correct commitments, such as a desire to win battles and celebrate triumphs owing to the advantages they shall bring; such glory, in so far as it is glory, is temporary and unstable, since popular acclaim does not necessarily last for ever and the so-called great deeds in any case might be judged differently by different people. The central lesson is clear: without virtuous character there is no true glory and no immortal fame. In his speech *Pro Marcello* (25–30) Cicero actually warns Caesar of the distinction between the two glories in clear terms.²⁶

Now, Cicero's model of *vera gloria* is clearly in harmony with what he reports about Aristotle's advice to Alexander: immortal fame is concomitant with true glory, which comes only from honourable deeds arising from a sincere commitment to what is good. Most crucially of all, Alexander has not yet attained this goal of true glory, being but a young man, so Aristotle's letters do not praise him on that account – they are intended to help him attain the goal by making clear the proper good and honourable path. So much seems clear from Cicero's letter. In the next section I argue that Cicero's own letter of advice to Caesar was a serious attempt to rework appropriately these Aristotelian concerns.

²⁵ Long (1995b) provides an excellent discussion connecting Cicero's thoughts on *gloria* in the *De officiis* with the recent example of Caesar; see also Dyck (1996: 413–26).

²⁶ See further Gildenhard (2011: 230–3).

5.2 Cicero on the good king

Aristotle offers a set of philosophical resources on kingship that is significantly different from that offered by Plato. The Platonic paradigm of tyranny seems to have been Cicero's favourite when discussing Caesar's desire for autocratic power and the nature of life under his rule; it is clearly very negative.²⁷ Of course, Plato also offers a vision of the good king: the philosopher-king (*Rep.* 473c–e). In contrast to Plato and his insistence that only philosophers should be kings, Aristotle himself is sympathetic to more traditional forms of kingship in the *Politics*.²⁸ Although some instances of kingly rule might be bad or corrupt (instances of tyranny) and he appears to advocate that in the best polis free men rule and are ruled in turn (*Pol.* 7.14, 1332b25–30), Aristotle also suggests in a number of places that if a man of outstanding virtue (ἀρετή) and practical capability (πρακτική δύναμις) emerges then it is surely right that he rule over all other men who are inferior to him (*Pol.* 3.13, 1284b25–34; 3.17, 1288a15–29; 7.3, 1325b10–14; 7.14, 1332b16–27); although such a man is in all likelihood an extremely rare phenomenon, it is apparent that this particular form of kingly rule is in fact the best possible constitution of all.²⁹

To be sure, the extent to which Cicero had intimate knowledge of Aristotle's *Politics* is uncertain.³⁰ In any case, Cicero's decision to turn towards Aristotle's letters to Alexander suggests that he was entertaining a new attitude towards kingship or autocracy in

²⁷ In particular, see [chapter 2](#) above.

²⁸ Indeed, a fragment of Aristotle's *On Kingship* (647 Rose) suggests that he went so far as to say that the king should not be a philosopher, although he could of course benefit from philosophical advice; see further Vander Waerdt (1985: 264–72).

²⁹ For discussion of this topic, see in particular Vander Waerdt (1985), who makes a detailed and compelling argument for Aristotle's preference for this form of kingship. Some scholars – for example Kelsen (1937) – have suggested that Aristotle had Alexander the Great in mind when describing the outstanding king. We have no direct evidence that such views on kingly character and rule were presented in Aristotle's letters to Alexander the Great or his treatise *On Kingship*, which is associated closely with Alexander in the tradition (ps.-Demetrius, *On Style* 234; 646 Rose), but if one takes seriously Aristotle's supposed authorship of those tracts then it would seem a reasonable inference to make.

³⁰ For discussion, see further Frede (1989: 80–1), Ferrary (1995: 54–5), and Barnes (1997: 44–50, 57–9).

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general. Instead of the Platonic view that all non-philosopher kings are bad, there is the chance that such a king might in fact be good. This is dependent on the man in power both possessing certain outstanding character traits and acting virtuously. To be sure, some vestiges of kingship were already ingrained in the fabric of the Roman republican constitution in the form of the traditional offices of dictator and pro-consul; and we have some evidence that the Greek tradition on kingship offered useful resources when giving advice concerning the virtues one should exhibit when holding such offices.³¹ Thus, I suggest, Cicero drew on Aristotelian resources concerning kingship so that he could give advice to Caesar, a man of outstanding practical capability who was already essentially in the position of a king, that would lead him from the threat of Platonic tyranny – which leads to personal wretchedness as well as terrible ills in the state (e.g., *Rep.* 576b7–c4, 579c4–580a8) – to the promise of being a great virtuous king on Aristotle’s model, which brings the immortal fame of true glory for the individual as well as genuine benefits for the state as a whole.

Unfortunately, we are in a very difficult position when it comes to confirming my hypothesis. When assessing the nature of Cicero’s letter to Caesar we are of course hindered since we do not actually possess it. However, we are still able to go some way in giving my claim more than a little plausibility. For a start, it will be useful to trace the ongoing exchange with Atticus about the letter’s genesis, content, and subsequent fate, so that we have a clear account of all the relevant evidence.

On 14 May Cicero informs Atticus that, amidst his other writing (he was currently also composing the *Academica*; 12.44.4 = SB 285), he has completed a draft of the letter to Caesar because Atticus thought it was a good thing to do: *equidem credibile non est quantum scribam, quin etiam noctibus; nihil enim somni. heri etiam effeci epistulam ad Caesarem*;

³¹ See in particular Philodemus’ *On the Good King according to Homer* and Cicero’s letter of advice to his brother Quintus (1.1 = 1 SB). Although note also that it was an established mode of Roman political invective to use Greek terminology concerning kingship; see further Dunkle (1967), Rawson (1975), and Erskine (1991).

tibi enim placebat ('You really would not believe how much I am writing, even at night, since I get no sleep. Yesterday I even drafted a letter to Caesar, since you thought it a good thing to do', 13.26.2 = 286 SB). He then remarks that it might be of use, but not at the present time, and suggests that he will only send it once he gets the go-ahead from Atticus: *quam non fuit malum scribi, si forte opus esse putares; ut quidem nunc est, nihil sane est necesse mittere* ('There was nothing bad in writing it, if by chance you might think it useful; but as things are now, it is certainly not necessary to send it', 13.26.2). He does, however, send a copy of the letter to Atticus himself. We then hear nothing about Atticus' response to the letter until 20 May, despite daily letters between the pair. Atticus apparently was in favour of sending the letter to Caesar and Cicero professes agreement with this view. The reasons why Cicero agrees with Atticus are most informative:

epistulam ad Caesarem mitti video tibi placere. quid quaeris? mihi quoque hoc idem maxime placuit, et eo magis quod nihil est in ea nisi optimi civis, sed ita optimi ut tempora; quibus parere omnes πολιτικοὶ praecipiunt. sed scis ita nobis esse visum ut isti ante legerent. tu igitur id curabis. sed nisi plane iis intelleges placere, mittenda non est. id autem utrum illi sentiant ane simulent tu intelleges. mihi simulatio pro repudiatione fuerit. τοῦτο δὲ μὴ λῶσθι. (Cicero, *Epistulae ad Atticum* 12.51.2 = 293 SB)

I see that it pleases you that I send my letter to Caesar. What are you getting at? In short, this same idea also pleased me greatly, and especially because there is nothing in it at odds with an excellent citizen, well, as excellent as the times dictate – to them all statesmen teach compliance. But you know then that I thought that they should read it beforehand. Therefore, you will deal with that matter. But unless you discern plainly that they approve, it must not be sent. Whether or not they really think so or are pretending, you will tell. For me, pretending will be the same as rejection. You will probe this matter.

Evidently Cicero thinks that his letter befits a good citizen, albeit in an interesting way owing to the pressures of the current circumstances. This suggests that in his letter he appears to be a loyal subject of Caesar; but, I suggest, he was not presenting himself as a sycophantic subject but rather as a critical advisor who could speak frankly and freely, with such freedom being integral to the advisor–advisee relationship as we saw with Cicero's earlier

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assumption of the Platonic persona in 49 BC.³² By composing a letter of advice Cicero could adopt the register of free and frank speech, which was integral to the genre, and present himself as an independent yet privileged member of the governing circle around Caesar. This tension surrounding the limits of freedom of speech seems to be why Cicero is worried about the letter's reception: can he get away with adopting the mantle of advisor to Caesar and with being outspoken in this manner? In any case, he seems to be angling for a positive response to the letter that would allow him to wield (or at least be seen as wielding) some degree of influence over Caesar. On offer in exchange for having the letter released publicly is the esteem his evident support for the new order (or at least his apparent willingness to work closely with Caesar) would bring. Such anxieties about the strength of his political position and the appropriate tone of the letter are why Cicero has sent the draft to Atticus and Caesar's close agents for feedback.

We then hear nothing about the letter's fate – although Cicero pushes Atticus about it twice (12.52.2 = 294 SB, 13.1.3 = 296 SB) – until a very terse and short note that refers to the humiliating reply Cicero received from Oppius and Balbus: *gratior mihi celeritas tua quam ipsa res. quid enim indignius? sed iam ad ista obduruimus et humanitatem omnem exuimus* ('Your swiftness is more welcome to me than the matter itself – for what is more humiliating? But now I have become hardened towards such things and I have put to one side all human feeling', 13.2.1 = 297 SB). This letter is very unusual in the Ciceronian corpus and appears to be a knee-jerk reaction. In a more carefully worded letter the next day Cicero has noticeably changed his tune:

de epistula ad Caesarem, nobis vero semper rectissime placuit ut isti ante legerent. aliter enim fuisset et in hos <in>officiosi et in nosmet ipsos, si illum offensuri fuimus, paene periculosi. isti autem ingenue, mihi quae gratum quod quid sentirent non reticuerunt; illud vero vel optime, quod ita multa mutari volunt ut mihi de integro scribendi causa non sit. quamquam de Parthico bello, quid spectare debui nisi quod illum velle arbitrabar? quod enim aliud argumentum epistulae nostrae nisi κολῳκεία fuit? an, si ea quae optima putarem suadere voluissem, oratio mihi defuisset? totis igitur litteris nihil opus est. ubi enim

³² See chapter 2, sections 2.4 and 2.5 above.

ἐπίτευγμα magnum nullum fieri possit, ἀπώτευγμα vel non magnum molestum futurum sit, quid opus est παρακινδυνεύειν? praesertim cum illud occurrat, illum, cum antea nihil scripserim, existimaturum me nisi toto bello confecto nihil scripturum fuisse. atque etiam vereor ne putet me hoc quasi ‘Catonis’ μείλιγμα esse voluisse. quid quaeris? valde me paenitebat, nec mihi in hac quidem re quicquam magis ut vellem accidere potuit quam quod σπουδὴ nostra non est probata. (Cicero, *Epistulae ad Atticum* 13.27.1 = 298 SB)

About my letter to Caesar, in truth I was always for excellent reasons in favour that they might read it beforehand. Otherwise I would have been both discourteous to them and almost dangerous to myself, if it were going to offend him. They acted with candour, and I am thankful that they wanted so many things to be changed that there was no point in me writing it afresh. Although regarding the Parthian war, what should I have tended towards except what I judged he wanted? What else was there for the subject matter of my letter except flattery? Or, if I wanted to advise him what things I thought best, would the words have deserted me? Therefore, there is no need for the whole letter. For when no great successful work is able to be achieved, and even a minor failure is going to be unpleasant, what need is there to risk it? Especially when it occurs to me that he will think that, since I have written nothing up until now, I was going to write nothing unless the whole war was over. And indeed I am afraid lest he thinks that I wanted this to be a kind of atonement for the *Cato*. What are you getting at? In short, I was regretting it immensely, and, for me, in this matter nothing better could in fact come about (so that I wish it) than that my zeal was not approved.

Evidently Cicero is happy with the rejection on balance, since he claims that he was not that happy with the piece anyway: it was bad enough already. But what was so bad about it? Only a few days previously he seemed more or less happy with the letter, even eager to have it published immediately. Clearly Cicero had put his reputation on the line: he had presumed and sought to display his own importance, perhaps even acted overzealously. The reply came in no uncertain terms: he was not in a position of authority or respect at all; he was a subject expected to flatter Caesar and toe the line. The blunt response was, it seems, a shock, a humiliation, and realising that any changes to make the letter more positive would only feed such an impression further – both in his own self-judgement and also among others – he decided the best thing would be to hold firm and let the whole thing sink.

But how might Cicero resist in a way that did not amount to an obvious defiance of the regime – could he simply refuse outright?

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It seems that Atticus put some pressure on him to go along with the requests of Oppius and Balbus, and to put concerns of shame to one side:

de epistula ad Caesarem, iurato mihi crede, non possum; nec me turpitudine deterret, etsi maxime debebat. quam enim turpis est adsentatio, cum vivere ipsum turpe sit nobis! sed ut coepi, non me hoc turpe deterret (ac vellem quidem; essem enim qui esse debebam), sed in mentem nihil venit. (Cicero, *Epistulae ad Atticum* 13.28.2 = 299 SB)

About the letter to Caesar, I swear an oath, I cannot; shame does not deter me, even though it most certainly should. For how shameful flattery is, when to be alive itself is shameful for me! But as I began, this shame does not deter me (I wish it did, for I would be who I ought to be), but nothing comes to my mind.

Importantly, Cicero is at pains to stress that it is not his personal shame and sensitivities holding him back but rather worries about making the letter work as an appropriate piece of literature on the model of Aristotle's letters. To be sure, Cicero was deeply concerned about his literary legacy and the quality of what was attributed to him, be it jokes, speeches, or letters (*Att.* 3.12.2 = 57 SB, *Fam.* 3.11.5 = 74 SB, 7.32.2 = 113 SB, 9.16.4 = 190 SB); critics such as Caesar were apparently extremely skilled at identifying genuine pieces of Ciceronian writing and phrasing (*Fam.* 9.16.4). This works to Cicero's advantage here: a poorly written letter that trampled on the conventions of the συμβουλευτικόν would look un-Ciceronian and so fail to provide any real benefits to Caesar. Hence Cicero stalls on this account: any changes would ruin the letter by altering it irrevocably from what it purports to be; and indeed it is already problematic anyway. This is a sophisticated response to the problem of what to do in response to the request for changes, and in the rest of this letter Cicero expends some energy on developing the case in as much detail as he can.

He proceeds to explain to Atticus that the problems arise from a lack of fit between the Aristotelian model and what pertains with respect to Caesar. A pandering letter, now requested by Oppius and Balbus, would be something quite different from a letter of advice on the model of Aristotle's letters to Alexander. Furthermore, the parallels between Alexander and Caesar are highly problematic. The sentence following the passage just cited begins

with an explanatory *nam* (13.28.2–3 = 299 SB; text provided in full on pages 200–1 above), and in it Cicero questions his own judgement in conceiving of the piece the way he did in the first place – there are so many inconsistencies since Caesar does not stand up to comparison with Alexander. Cicero provides some examples: Alexander the youth desired true glory (*verissima gloria*), whereas Caesar in his past and present deeds has shown himself satisfied with *ficta gloria*. Any high-flown philosophical discussion of *gloria* by Cicero would suggest this shortcoming on the part of Caesar (and so invite disapproval).³³ Indeed, although Alexander had outstanding personal attributes and acted excellently for a period, he became a tyrant once he assumed sole power. One might easily see Caesar, despite his outstanding qualities, as the old tyrant that the promising young Alexander became – indeed he has already hubristically placed himself alongside Romulus the king in the sacred procession.³⁴ One can quickly appreciate the problems Cicero risked by imitating Aristotle and portraying Caesar as a new Alexander in his συμβουλευτικόν.

To be sure, the Aristotle and Alexander comparison is apt for Cicero's project in a number of senses. Aristotle was of course looking to the future with the young Alexander, full of potential. The parallel implies that Cicero is also forward-looking: he did not want to condone the past and present actions of Caesar but rather to change his mode of conduct in the future (cf 13.31.3 = 302 SB).³⁵ Second, Alexander was someone who united the disparate Greek city-states after a long period of conflict and then led them to great conquests in the east: if only Caesar could do something similar and unite the Romans. Alexander is also an epitome of an outstanding man with natural brilliance, albeit brilliance that ultimately did not find its full positive realisation (13.28.3 = 299 SB). He had the chance to be truly godlike, and indeed for a while was to a certain degree. Caesar in Cicero's

³³ Although the same distinction is clear in the *Pro Marcello* (25–30).

³⁴ Schmidt (1893: 62) notes some parallels with Alexander's actions.

³⁵ Compare the *Pro Marcello*, which also highlights goals for the future that Caesar has not yet achieved.

5.2 Cicero on the good king

opinion is also a great man of outstanding quality: at the start of the *Pro Marcello*, for example, Cicero (perhaps ironically) refers to his ‘almost godlike wisdom’ (*sapientia paene divina*) (1), and even after his death Cicero acknowledges that he had a great soul and was possessed of amazing practical capability (*Off.* 1.26). Despite the excesses of the past, Caesar might yet change so as to allow a positive expression of his inherent *magnitudo animi*, which Cicero stresses always has great potential for both good and bad (*Off.* 1.26, 1.65–6).³⁶ Indeed, in his letters to various correspondents around this time, Cicero suggests that Caesar is already showing genuine signs of moderation, justice, and virtue (e.g., *Fam.* 4.4.3, 6.10b.2, 6.13.2 = 227 SB, 4.8.2 = 229 SB, 6.6.8–10 = 234 SB, 4.6.3 = 249 SB). I suggest it was here that Cicero was hoping to make mileage: despite everything that had happened, given his outstanding qualities and *magnitudo animi* Caesar still had the capacity to be a good ruler.³⁷

In general terms that much perhaps is clear; but we can also get a handle on more specific aspects of Cicero’s advice. Two letters to Atticus provide us with some helpful details. In 13.31.3 (= 302 SB) Cicero writes:

de epistula ad Caesarem κέρρικα; atque id ipsum quod isti aiunt illum scribere, se nisi constitutis rebus non iturum in Parthos, idem ego suadebam in illa epistula. utrum liberet facere posset auctore m<e>. hoc enim ille exspectat videlicet, neque est facturus quicquam nisi de meo consilio. obsecro, abiciamus ista et semiliberi saltem simus; quod adsequemur et tacendo et latendo. (Cicero, *Epistulae ad Atticum* 13.31.3)

It’s a done deal about the letter to Caesar; and that very thing that they say he wrote, that unless he had settled matters he would not campaign against the Parthians, I recommended the same thing in that letter. He can do as he pleases on my authority. For evidently he is waiting for this, and he will not do anything except on my advice. I beseech you, let us reject such things and be semi-free at least, which we shall achieve by both staying quiet and keeping a low profile.

³⁶ Cicero’s view is in keeping with both Plato and Aristotle, who both suggest that the greatest souls have the greatest potential for both virtue and excess.

³⁷ I develop this further in [section 5.3](#) below.

And in 13.7.1 (= 314 SB) he writes:

venisse a Caesare narrabat litteras; hoc scribere, sibi certum esse Romae manere, causamque eam ascribere quae erat in epistula nostra, ne se absente leges suae neglegerentur sicut esset neglecta sumptuaria (est εὐλογον, idque eram suspicatus; sed istis mos gerendus est, nisi placet hanc ipsam sententiam nos persequi). (Cicero, *Epistulae ad Atticum* 13.7.1)

He reported that letters have come from Caesar and that he wrote this, that he is certain to stay at Rome, and that he gives the reason which was in my letter, lest his laws might be disregarded in his absence just as the sumptuary law has been disregarded (it is reasonable, and I had foreseen it; but they must be humoured, unless it pleases them that I pursue this very opinion).

In keeping with the genre's traditional focus on practical advice, we have here very specific references to two pressing concerns of the time: on the one hand, the desire to do something about the Parthians; and on the other hand, the desire to reform the laws and bring stability to the body politic. One aspect concerns the treatment of internal disturbance and civil strife; the other aspect concerns the treatment of external threats to the state's well-being.³⁸ In both respects a clear case could be made that the threats were real and urgent: the Parthians remained a force threatening the eastern provinces and had already defeated a Roman army led by Crassus;³⁹ the lawlessness and instability at Rome threatened further unrest and civic bloodshed. In both cases Cicero's advice matched closely what Caesar was already doing: an expedition against the Parthians was being planned for 44 BC (App. *BCiv.* 2.110–1; Cass. Dio 43.51–44.1, 44.46; Plut. *Caes.* 60.1);⁴⁰ and Caesar was indeed making significant efforts to reform the laws so as to restore order and stability at Rome.⁴¹

³⁸ Cicero's advice appears to have been in keeping with a framework apparent in the works of Plato and Aristotle: the state faces both external and internal threats and both must be dealt with effectively by those in power (e.g., Plat. *Rep.* 351d4–352a9, 443d–444e, 462a–e, 470b, 545c–549d, 556e; Arist. *Pol.* 1301a–1316b).

³⁹ On Crassus' defeat by the Parthians, see further Sampson (2008).

⁴⁰ For detailed discussion of Caesar's planning for war with the Parthians, see Malitz (1984).

⁴¹ The precise details are not always clear, but evidently Caesar's legislative activities affected a number of spheres of Roman life. For example, there were new sumptuary laws to check immoral luxury and extravagance (Suet. *Div. Iul.* 43.2); the comprehensive *Lex Iulia Municipalis* that reformed many aspects of the governance of rural Italy, for which see Hardy (1912: 136–63); the disbanding of the guilds (Suet. *Div. Iul.* 42.3);

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In his letters to Atticus Cicero is somewhat rankled since Caesar appears to be deriving the rationale for the nature of these actions from his own letter of advice, which of course had been rejected.

The specific nature of Cicero's advice to Caesar is fitting given practical realities at Rome, but it should be stressed that it is embedded firmly in a theoretical framework with a strong Aristotelian pedigree. In the next section I seek to orientate the συμβουλευτικόν more clearly within a larger philosophical-political vision that Cicero was developing in 45 BC concerning the restoration of the *res publica* following the terrible civil war, a process that would involve the rehabilitation of Caesar himself from budding tyrant to true Roman statesman in the traditional role of dictator.

5.3 Rehabilitating Caesar dictator

The three so-called Caesarian speeches from 46/45 BC can be read as suggesting that Cicero was prepared to support Caesar, contingent on a number of factors,⁴² the most pressing being that Caesar would need to enact pressing social reforms and restore the republican constitution in due course (e.g., *Marc.* 22–33).⁴³ Indeed, in certain letters Cicero expresses genuine hope that he might do this (e.g., *Fam.* 4.4.3–4 = 203 SB, 13.68.2 = 211 SB, 6.10b.2 = 222 SB). Towards this end, Cicero makes it clear that Caesar would also now have to act honourably and exhibit his undoubted magnanimity in a positive fashion, rather than the

the famous changing of the calendar (Plut. *Caes.* 59); and reforms to the laws concerning debt and credit (Plut. *Caes.* 37.1; Suet. *Div. Iul.* 42.1–2). For further discussion of Caesar's legislative activities, see, for example, Hardy (1924) and Frederiksen (1966).

⁴² As noted earlier, some scholars have made the case that these speeches contain carefully constructed dissident subtexts and so can be read as highly critical of Caesar. Such readings can be constructed with varying degrees of ingenuity, but the alternative, more positive reading remains on the table and, I think, requires less sophisticated justification while offering interesting insights into other aspects of Cicero's thought and practice with regard to Caesar at this time.

⁴³ This theme of social reform seems to have been ubiquitous in 46/45 BC. There is some very contentious evidence in the form of apparently open letters to Caesar that favour a restoration of the *res publica* – the *Epistulae ad Caesarem senem de republica*, traditionally attributed to Sallust but whose authorship is unclear. The first letter was apparently composed around 46 BC. For critical discussion of these letters, see for example Syme (1958).

reprehensible way so recently exhibited (e.g., *Marc.* 28–30). Cicero again in certain letters praises Caesar's character, his virtuous conduct, and his natural disposition towards moderation and justice (e.g., *Fam.* 4.4.3, 6.10b.2, 6.13.2 = 227 SB, 4.8.2 = 229 SB, 6.6.8–10 = 234 SB, 4.6.3 = 249 SB). Despite his rather provocative publication of the *Cato* and the vivid laments for the *res publica* that proliferate in his letters to republican sympathisers (e.g., *Fam.* 9.20.3 = 193 SB, 7.28.3 = 200 SB, 4.3.2 = 202 SB),⁴⁴ we can appreciate that Cicero was prepared to entertain and develop a more sympathetic narrative concerning Caesar's future.⁴⁵

From what we have seen already, it appears that in his letter of advice Cicero in all likelihood adopted a twofold strategy in this regard: (1) appeal to Caesar's own personal and philosophical sensitivities by stressing the nature of true glory and its ties to *magnitudo animi*, justice, virtue, and public service; (2) put forward a viable plan whereby Caesar could restore the *res publica* through great civic actions – just law-making and oversight, clemency, the recovery of lost national honour by reclaiming the standards lost in the east. In other words, in all probability Cicero stressed in the letter of advice that Caesar's personal goals were allied truly with those of the *res publica* itself.⁴⁶ But, one might then wonder, why did Cicero turn towards Aristotle and the paradigm of kingship to make these points?

A key factor to stress is that, although Cicero was drawing on Aristotle, he was almost certainly not advocating kingship on the Aristotelian model in all its respects. It would be very strange if, following Aristotle's reasoning in the *Politics*, Cicero were really prepared to suggest that Caesar should become king given his

⁴⁴ See further chapter 4, section 4.4 above.

⁴⁵ Of course, Cicero needed some sort of positive relationship with Caesar in order to facilitate the return to Rome of various republican supporters on whose behalf he was acting, and in certain letters he claims explicitly to possess intimate ties with Caesar and his closest friends (e.g., *Fam.* 4.13.6 = 225 SB, 6.12.2 = 226 SB, 6.13.2 = 227 SB, 6.14.1 = 228 SB, 6.6.13 = 234 SB).

⁴⁶ This is entirely in keeping with the model of his own *De republica*, in which the good of the statesman is allied with and dependent on the good of the *res publica*: *nec bene vivi sine bona re publica posset nec esse quicquam civitate bene constituta beatius* (5.7). Zetzel (1999: xvii) states the point well: Cicero makes 'individual morality contingent on the values of civic life and public service'.

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undoubted superiority to all the other men at Rome. But it would make sense for him to suggest that now Caesar is in the autocratic king-like position of dictator he should work for the good of the state in this time of emergency.

To be sure, the dictatorship was tarnished following the excesses of Sulla, who held the office in 82 BC, apparently with an indefinite remit even though he surrendered the office (Cic. *Att.* 9.15.2 = 183 SB; Plut. *Sull.* 33.1; App. *BCiv.* 1.98–9); and indeed the dictatorship had not been held in its traditional form, where it was bestowed on a citizen by senatorial or consular decree for a temporary period in a time of national emergency, since 202 BC (Liv. 30.39.4–5).⁴⁷ There is good evidence that following Sulla the dictatorship carried with it strong connotations of the desire for kingship and unchecked power, and as such was a dangerous office with which to be associated (e.g., Cic. *Phil.* 1.4).⁴⁸ None the less, there are signs that Cicero himself was sympathetic to the institution of the dictatorship in a certain form and in certain circumstances; for in *De republica* there appears to be a sanctioned role for one man as dictator when the *res publica* faced specific crises.

In *De republica* Cicero is in many respects sympathetic to kingship in general.⁴⁹ For example, the character Scipio considers kingship the best unmixed form of constitution (1.54, 1.69), even though he rejects kingship as being the best of all possible constitutions owing to the restrictions it places on liberty (1.43). Scipio also praises the just kings of Rome's past and suggests that they deserved the goodwill that came their way (1.54, 1.64). But, as well as the restrictions on liberty, kingship is tarnished owing to the natural threat of the king becoming unjust and a tyrant (1.64–8). There is, however, still a vital role for the king in the mixed constitution (1.69). Indeed, Scipio had earlier suggested

⁴⁷ For discussion of the office of dictator in the Roman republic, see Lintott (1999: 109–13) with further references. After 202 BC it was replaced by the *senatus consultum ultimum*, which gave emergency powers to both consuls.

⁴⁸ See further Stevenson (2005: 144–5, 151–2).

⁴⁹ For discussion of Cicero's attitudes towards kingship in *De republica*, see, for example, Michelfeit (1964), Krarup (1973), Cambeis (1984), Sharples (1986), Ferrary (1995: 55–64), and Stevenson (2005).

that if a great man of outstanding virtue arose then it would be suitable for him to play the kingly role alone (*qui si unus satis omnia consequi posset, nihil opus esset pluribus*, 1.52–3). This could conceivably be as sole consul (like Pompey in 52 BC) or perhaps as dictator. In any case, Scipio suggests that in times of emergency people of their own accord have opted for one man to take sole authority (1.63). Later he alludes to the inauguration of the dictatorship by Titus Larcus (in 508 BC) and notes that the office was seen as embodying power close to that of a king (*novumque id genus imperii visum est et proximum similitudini regiae*, 2.56). And in the report of his dream, Scipio himself is mentioned as a potential future dictator, given the emergency involving the Gracchi that threatens the stability of the *res publica* (6.12). The passage is particularly striking, and so worth quoting:

hic tu, Africane, ostendas oportebit patriae lumen animi, ingenii consilique tui . . . in te unum atque in tuum nomen se tota convertet civitas, te senatus, te omnes boni, te socii, te Latini intuebuntur, tu eris unus in quo nitatur civitatis salus, ac, ne multa, dictator rem publicam constituas oportet, si impias propinquorum manus effugeris. (Cicero, *De republica* 6.12)

Here you, Africanus, you ought to reveal to the fatherland the light of your character, your ability, your counsel . . . To you and to your name alone will the entire citizen body turn – the senate, all the good men, the allies, the Latins will look to you; you will be the one on whom the safety of the state rests and, to be brief, you must as dictator settle the state, if you escape the wicked hands of your neighbours.

Despite various uncertainties surrounding how to interpret this passage,⁵⁰ it seems to me that here Cicero suggests quite strongly that the dictatorship is a fitting position for a man of Scipio's outstanding qualities to adopt in times of national crisis and that he should be prepared to accept such an office as a duty if called upon by his fellow citizens.

⁵⁰ For instance, given the negative connotations surrounding the office when Cicero was writing, could he really champion the dictatorship in this way? Does the fact that Scipio, as far as we can tell, never held the office change how we should interpret the passage? Is there a subtext concerning Pompey or even Cicero himself assuming sole power given the political crisis developing at Rome in the 50s? And so on. For discussion, see in particular Stevenson (2005) with further references.

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Therefore, in the *De republica* there appears to be a space for the office of dictator that is integrated into the mixed constitution. To be sure, the institution has clearly defined boundaries: it only becomes justifiable in certain extreme conditions; it relies on people choosing their dictator freely. The office is targeted at restoring the state to stability in times of civil strife, or else for dealing with foreign enemies in times of military emergency. Crucially, it cannot be a permanent office since it depends on resolving crises which are not permanent; and, in any case, it would seem that permanence leads to the slippery slope of kingship, loss of liberty, and tyranny. Indeed, in *De legibus* Cicero states that he would limit the dictatorship to a tenure of no longer than six months and that it would only be used in times of serious civil strife or war (3.9).

Now, it is clear that the ideal statesman can be identified closely with the ideal dictator – he, like Scipio, is in the best position to execute the role properly owing to his outstanding attributes and virtue. Moreover, in other parts of the *De republica* Cicero considers the ideal statesman essentially as a sort of king, since the two perform much the same roles and possess much the same qualities. This is most clear in the second book, where he contrasts the ideal statesman with the corrupted king, the tyrant, he had just been describing (2.43–51):

sit huic oppositus alter, bonus et sapiens et peritus utilitatis dignitatisque civilis quasi tutor et procurator rei publicae; sic enim appelletur, quicumque erit rector et gubernator civitatis. quem virum facite ut agnoscatis; iste est enim, qui consilio et opera civitatem tueri potest. (Cicero, *De republica* 2.51)

Let the opposite type to this man be of this sort – good, wise, and experienced as to practical needs and civic dignity, as it were a guardian and protector of the state. For let him be so called, whoever will be guide and pilot of the community. Be sure that you recognise such a man. For he is the one who is able to keep the community safe by spoken advice and by practical deeds.

He then defers describing the nature of this type of man, but we can see clearly in the fifth book that traditional kingly duties such as making just laws are indeed the preserve of the ideal statesman, and so being a good statesman and a good king involve the same virtues (5.3). Thus, to turn attention back to

the συμβουλευτικόν, it appears that we can identify closely Aristotle's great virtuous king with Cicero's ideal statesman of the *De republica*, who at certain times will assume the position of dictator.

Part of Aristotle's account of the great king is that others realise his superiority and so acquiesce freely to his rule since it is the just thing to do (*Pol.* 3.17, 1288a15–29; 7.3, 1325b10–14); likewise at Rome, the dictatorship was traditionally conferred on those deserving of it, as illustrated by the examples of men like Cincinnatus, who in 458 BC was taken from the plough to be dictator (*Cic. Fin.* 2.12). Cicero could, therefore, maintain the line that Caesar had a legitimate claim to dictatorial office owing to the current national crisis and the fact that the senate (however rump) ratified his assumption of the role for a set period of time.⁵¹ But he could also lay all this to one side and stress that in the position of dictator Caesar now had certain duties, and that to fulfil them he would have to act like the ideal statesman of the *De republica* and exercise his *magnitudo animi* and kingly powers in a virtuous manner; he would have to use the office for the national good, to restore stability and confront threats, and relinquish it after a temporary period on pain of being called *rex* rather than *dictator*.⁵² In his συμβουλευτικόν it would be fitting for Cicero to suggest to Caesar that, like Alexander the Great having just ascended to the throne, he is actually at a juncture that offers him the greatest opportunity: by excelling as dictator through his moderation, justice, and practical genius, he could restore the *res publica* to a state of health and attain thereby true glory and immortal fame. The alternative is only too clear.

⁵¹ Caesar had yet to be given the dictatorship for life at the time of the letter of advice.

⁵² It seems that Caesar was in fact called *rex* in 44 after assuming the dictatorship for life, and there are reports that he started to adopt kingly insignia but made a point of rejecting a formal offer of being made king (Suet. *Div. Iul.* 79.2; Plut. *Caes.* 60.1–2, 61.3–5; Dio Cass. 44.10.1; App. *BCiv.* 2.108). Much has been written on Caesar's attitudes towards kingship; see, for example, Deutsch (1928), Syme (1939: 51–60), Carson (1957), Rawson (1975), and Scullard (1982: 148–51) with further bibliography.

5.4 Conclusion

The story I have presented in this chapter is by no means conclusive given the amount of speculation that is inevitably required when discussing Cicero's συμβουλευτικόν. None the less, we do now have a better sense of what was involved. In all likelihood Cicero's συμβουλευτικόν was a mixture of specific practical advice given the present pressures still facing Caesar at Rome in the aftermath of a bloody civil conflict, coupled to a grand political-philosophical narrative for the future, involving the restoration of the *res publica* and the capture of the standards back from the Parthians to recover lost national honour – a repeat of Alexander's conquest of the east – and subsequent true glory and immortal fame for Caesar, now acting virtuously in the national interest in the traditional king-like office of dictator.

Cicero's modelling of his letter to Caesar on Aristotle's epistles to Alexander also highlights further his engagement with the Greek tradition of philosophical letters, in terms of both their philosophical content and their literary format. The letters to Atticus that we have considered in this chapter demonstrate the considerable efforts to which Cicero went in order to compose fitting and effective philosophical letters worthy of publication, warranting a place in his literary and philosophical oeuvre. Indeed, as well as providing further evidence that aspects of the Greek philosophical tradition on kingship – including notably the role of philosophic advisor – were applicable in the context of Roman political life, the episode of the συμβουλευτικόν also highlights Cicero's willingness and ability to draw on a set of philosophical resources that was not Platonic or inherently negative when addressing issues of autocracy and Caesarian rule.

CONCLUSIONS

The letters we have considered show Cicero's correspondence to be an extremely rich collection of texts that offer insights into a wide range of philosophical subjects and various aspects of Cicero's literary and philosophical practice. Recall, however, that this study is not an exhaustive or comprehensive account of all the letters of philosophical significance in the collection but instead has provided certain snapshots: it must be stressed that there is much more of philosophical interest to be uncovered in the correspondence. Each chapter has led to its own conclusions with respect to the particular letters and questions considered therein. In this concluding section I draw together the major findings of the five chapters and offer some thoughts on the directions that further enquiry into the philosophical dimensions of Cicero's correspondence might take. It is hoped that the findings of this study and the further questions they raise will be of interest to a wide range of scholars and prompt further enquiry into Cicero's correspondence from a number of different perspectives. They have resonance not only for those interested specifically in Cicero's philosophical and epistolary activities, but also for those interested in Roman epistolography in the late republic and ancient letters more generally, for those interested in the reception of Plato and Hellenistic philosophy at Rome, and for those interested in the philosophical environment of the first century BC and Roman intellectual and political culture more generally.

First, the five studies demonstrate that the letters are more than a repository of useful facts, and that Cicero's philosophical practice in the letters goes beyond playful badinage or the embellishment of other concerns. It is now a fundamental premiss in Ciceronian studies that the letters are carefully constructed pieces of literature that play dynamic roles in Roman social and political life: the letters show clear signs of careful literary design

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and are always in some sense a 'public' undertaking, and Cicero displays a keen awareness of the opportunities that letters present for the construction and projection of his 'public' self-image. The letters' true philosophical value and significance lie in the fact that they are in their own right serious and sophisticated elements of Cicero's philosophical practice located within this broader context.

The letters are a flexible and multi-faceted resource that can be put to various uses and approached in a number of ways. At different times we have focused, for instance, on particular isolated passages, on individual letters in their entirety, on narratives that run across a number of letters, and on clusters of letters that discuss certain themes. Also, at times we have made detailed intertextual readings on the basis of particularly resonant or evocative allusions, and we have been prepared to follow Cicero's own practice and reread certain letters retrospectively in the light of subsequent political developments. In particular, a significant dimension of the monograph has been the recovery and analysis through the letters of lost or obscured Hellenistic philosophical material that formed parts of Cicero's intellectual milieu, for instance Dicaearchus' argument for the supremacy of the active life and Zeno's views on obscenity and free and frank speech. We can then return to the letters to read them anew in the full light of this material: this 'double reading' often has striking results for our understanding of the text. The letters support these various approaches on their own terms: they are all motivated by prompts and evidence from within the letters themselves and their effects can be attributed with some confidence to Cicero's own practice, rather than to that of a later editor or an over-eager modern reader.

Within the collection there are a number of letters that can be positioned in the ancient tradition of philosophical letters: Cicero exploited the potential of the letter as a form of philosophical literature. In particular, he not only draws on the concepts, examples, and arguments contained in earlier Greek material such as the Platonic letters but also composes letters modelled on such originals. This proves that Cicero's philosophical works are more varied than we might have thought: he did not just compose

philosophical treatises and dialogues on Greek models but also philosophical letters. These letters – such as *Epistulae ad familiares* 9.22, the Stoic lecture addressed to Papirius Paetus, the letters of advice to Caesar and his brother Quintus, and the letters to Atticus from early 49 that form an apologetic narrative on the model of Plato's *Seventh Letter* – should be considered genuine parts of Cicero's philosophical oeuvre, even though they are not listed in Cicero's own account of his philosophical canon in *De divinatione*.

These findings encourage further enquiry into Cicero's engagement with and place in this epistolary and philosophical tradition. But the influence of Cicero's letters on later exponents of philosophical letters is another avenue that further enquiry might take. It is widely acknowledged that Cicero's letters exerted an exceptionally strong influence on later Roman letter writers with respect to epistolary style. In addition, we know that they were found philosophically interesting because Fronto, a prolific letter writer of the second century AD, says so in a letter to the emperor Antoninus Pius (3.8). Moreover, letter writing seems to have been an extremely popular mode of philosophical expression among Roman thinkers of the imperial period: one can make a case that Horace, Ovid, Pliny, Seneca, and Fronto all at some point, for some reason or another, wrote philosophical letters. In particular, Seneca in his *Moral Letters*, a very large collection of philosophical letters, suggests that Cicero was some sort of model or inspiration for his own epistolary enterprise (118). The impact of Cicero's letters on this very Roman philosophical tradition deserves closer attention.

The letters illustrate aspects of the reception of Greek philosophy at Rome in the first century BC. Cicero engages in the letters with a diverse range of material drawn from all the major Hellenistic philosophical schools: the Academy, Peripatos, Stoa, and Garden. He expects many of his Roman readers to be familiar with at least the basic tenets of all these schools, and with certain correspondents such as Varro and Atticus he expects expertise. The letters also offer insights into developments and controversies in the philosophical scene of the first century BC. Cicero often highlights philosophical debates both within and between schools:

for example, the otherwise unattested debate over obscenity and free and frank speech between the Academy and the Stoic Zeno, the otherwise unattested *controversia* over the best life between the Peripatetics Theophrastus and Dicaearchus, and the opposing views of Diodorus Cronus and Chrysippus on possibility, actuality, and necessity. Cicero engages knowledgeably and comfortably with these debates, and he is often prepared to be assertive in making the case for his own preference for one side or another. He also often shows the relevance of such philosophical debates to certain practical ethical and political problems in Roman society, a theme to which I will return in more detail shortly. These were clearly live debates in the philosophical environment of the first century BC; we can use the letters to go some way in reconstructing the arguments and the most urgent and pressing philosophical issues at this period.

Of special interest is the reception of Plato, in particular the Platonic letters. Cicero's letters present to us the first evidence in antiquity for the existence of these Platonic letters. The use to which Cicero consistently puts them illustrates that Plato was considered a positive authority for political conduct and that Cicero could expect at least a certain aristocratic literate elite to be familiar with these texts.¹ Plato is closely identified with a form of philosophy that suits Roman cultural pressures: he offers a role for theory in practice and he epitomises in his own actions in Sicily how a philosopher can properly engage in politics. This raises a number of questions about the role of the Platonic letters in the Academy, which had a long history of involvement in political affairs and the education of aspiring statesmen,² and the Roman reception of Plato the political figure is another area ripe for further study.

¹ See in particular [chapter 1, section 1.1](#).

² Cicero's own education bears testament to this (Cic. *Brut.* 303–22; Plut. *Cic.* 3.1–4.7); and ancient authors recount many examples, some negative and some positive, of Academics undertaking a wide range of political activities in various city-states, including embassies, advising rulers in the manner of Plato, and codifying laws (e.g., Plat. *Ep.* 3, 6; Arist. *Protrep.*; Cic. *De or.* 2.155–61; Plut. *Adv. Col.* 1126c–e; DL 3.23–4; Athen. *Deipn.* 11.508d–509b). For detailed critical discussion, see Chroust (1967), Guthrie (1975: 17–32), Brunt (1993: 282–342), and Schofield (2000b: 293–302) with extensive further references.

The letters show that Cicero did not just engage in bursts of philosophical activity when politics was not a viable option for him. Cicero's philosophical interests and activities are mentioned in the correspondence continuously, beginning in letters to Atticus from well before his consulship. For Cicero, philosophy was not merely a pursuit forced upon him by circumstances but an ongoing concern: philosophical interests and activities permeated Cicero's life, both public and private. There is, however, in the letters an evident shift in Cicero's attitudes towards the role and place of philosophy. Before his exile in 58 BC there is evidence that he considered philosophy to be a reflective exercise with its place firmly in *otium*, a pursuit dissociated strongly from politics proper. In the years following his return from exile he identifies a dynamic place for philosophy in practical politics, canvassing this idea to a wide Roman audience in an open letter from December 54 and in the autobiographical prefaces to his philosophical dialogues.

In his letters Cicero explores and develops the ways in which one might use philosophy effectively when engaging in politics. He does this by drawing heavily on the example of Plato at Syracuse and the resources of Platonic philosophy, particularly those found in the *Seventh Letter*. Cicero appropriates a wide range of arguments, concepts, language, identities, and roles from this rich Platonic milieu. This is most apparent with respect to Cicero's portrayal of himself in the Platonic role of philosophic advisor in early 49 BC, a position which allows him to apply readily philosophical principles in his political dealings and to probe in practice the limits of philosophy's effectiveness in Roman practical politics. In this role, drawing on further Platonic concepts from other texts such as the *Republic* and *Phaedrus*, Cicero highlights the conditions and relationships required for successful application of philosophical precepts and advice at Rome and the reasons why they might collapse and philosophy fail to be effective. But Cicero's resources are not limited only to Platonic material: at other times we also see him drawing heavily on Peripatetic and Stoic philosophy as a means to navigate various ethical and political problems, for instance the limits of free speech under Caesar and whether traditional modes of political

action were possible at Rome on his return from the governorship of Cilicia. In his letters Cicero creates the impression that philosophy – and Platonic philosophy especially – is a genuinely effective tool to apply to Roman practical politics, at least if wielded appropriately, that is, in a manner sensitive to the pressures of particular circumstances.

A number of other ethical issues preoccupy Cicero throughout the letters. In particular, he often engages with the conflict between the *honestum* and the *utile* when assessing his own conduct. Although for the most part careful to present himself as attentively following the *honestum* even when situations are difficult, Cicero shows himself prepared in certain cases to follow what is expedient. He is quite prepared to show his intellectual and moral sympathies, but in practical terms ultimately Cicero is a pragmatist: by no means is he committed unreservedly to following any particular ethical doctrine whatever the circumstances. Indeed, he suggests that that is an unreasonable and even stupid way to act. The question of the best mode of life also arises time and again in the correspondence. Once more, Cicero's engagement with the question is strongly conditional: he stresses that one must be flexible and give particular consideration to the present circumstances when choosing one's mode of life. We see repeatedly deliberation on either side of the question, especially at times of personal and political upheaval. It is consistently clear, however, that Cicero is most sympathetic to the political life, which appears to be the default choice unless there are exceptional circumstances. Indeed, we also see that Cicero on the whole does not advocate outright rejection of politics when changing one's mode of life to that associated most with *otium*. After his exile he maintains that the contemplative life of intellectual pursuits, which previously was presented as involving a split from politics proper, is permissible in so far as it does not involve neglect of one's Roman duties and so long as it fosters or has application to civic virtue, the greater good. Cicero consistently advocates that one should prefer the political life, but such a life can take a wide range of forms befitting the circumstances: traditional Roman political roles, the Platonic guise of philosophic advisor, and even that of an intellectual reading and writing philosophical treatises in

otium, which is a practice Cicero associates at various times with Theophrastus, the Stoics, and Plato.

It is clear from this that a view still common among scholars, namely that there was in late republican Rome a sharp and categorical distinction between the acceptable Roman political life, epitomised in the traditional actions of a citizen and statesman, and the apolitical philosophical life of *otium*, associated most with Greeks and idle Epicureans, is untenable: there was a third option, the philosopher engaged in politics, identified most vividly with Plato, towards which, at least from the mid 50s, Cicero could presume a sympathetic aristocratic Roman audience. Indeed, in his letters Cicero uses philosophy often for the purposes of *consolatio* and *apologia* for his political actions. He presents himself as acting nobly and consistently from philosophical principle and expects to receive a positive reception from not just individual correspondents but also an elite, philosophically informed Roman audience, as our analysis of open letters such as *Epistulae ad familiares* 1.9 indicates. Evidently it was good to be considered a philosopher of a certain sort: not one who is idle or committed to abstract theorising, but one who actively and consistently follows and applies principle in practical affairs. Being a philosopher of this sort could command respect. It appears that there was a form or function of philosophy acceptable to a Roman audience, and Cicero exploits this in his letters when presenting a positive image of himself for public consumption.

There is not a powerful agenda in the letters with respect to Cicero marketing his philosophical allegiance: overall he appears to act in accordance with what we might expect from an Academic sceptic, identifying his actions most closely with the practice and tenets of Plato; but he presents himself as being in broad sympathy with the Stoa and Peripatos as well. All share a focus on the *honestum* rather than the *utile*, which Cicero frequently highlights as good and proper in contrast to the reprehensible position of the Epicureans. But Cicero does not wish to be committed unconditionally or rigidly to one particular set of tenets: his fundamental guiding principle is to adjust to circumstances in a proper fashion and apply whichever doctrines and arguments are most appropriate, effective, or persuasive given the particular conditions. This is

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something that he highlights explicitly numerous times and identifies strongly with the practice of Plato; but this sort of conditional stance can also be detected in the Stoa and Peripatos. It is perhaps ultimately futile to seek to reconstruct a strict partisan picture of Cicero's philosophical allegiance through the correspondence.

None the less, in the letters there is a clear intellectual agenda, and it is on this note that I shall conclude: Cicero presents himself as an intelligent, principled, well-informed, highly erudite, thoughtful, skilled aristocrat and statesman, who is able to wield a diverse range of philosophical arguments and conceptual resources appropriately, effectively, and cleverly in Roman social and political matters. A number of times this is identified closely with the practice of Plato and Socrates, whom Cicero presents as authoritative figures not only for philosophical but also political practice. We can see in the letters that Cicero did not conceive of philosophy as a practice or mode of life limited to the composition and perusal of dialogues and treatises, the exercises of the schoolbook, the conviviality of the symposium or casual meeting of friends, or the refuge of *otium*. In his letters Cicero develops and actively pursues a Roman form of philosophy, in which philosophical theory has a natural place in the navigation of social space and the execution of practical politics: the letters portray an image of Cicero living a genuine 'philosophical life' sensitive to and befitting the specific demands of Roman culture.

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